

THE NEW YORKER'S MR. SHAWN / THREE REVELATIONS ABOUT LBJ

# The Atlantic Monthly

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## THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS OF MORALITY

BY  
EDWARD O. WILSON

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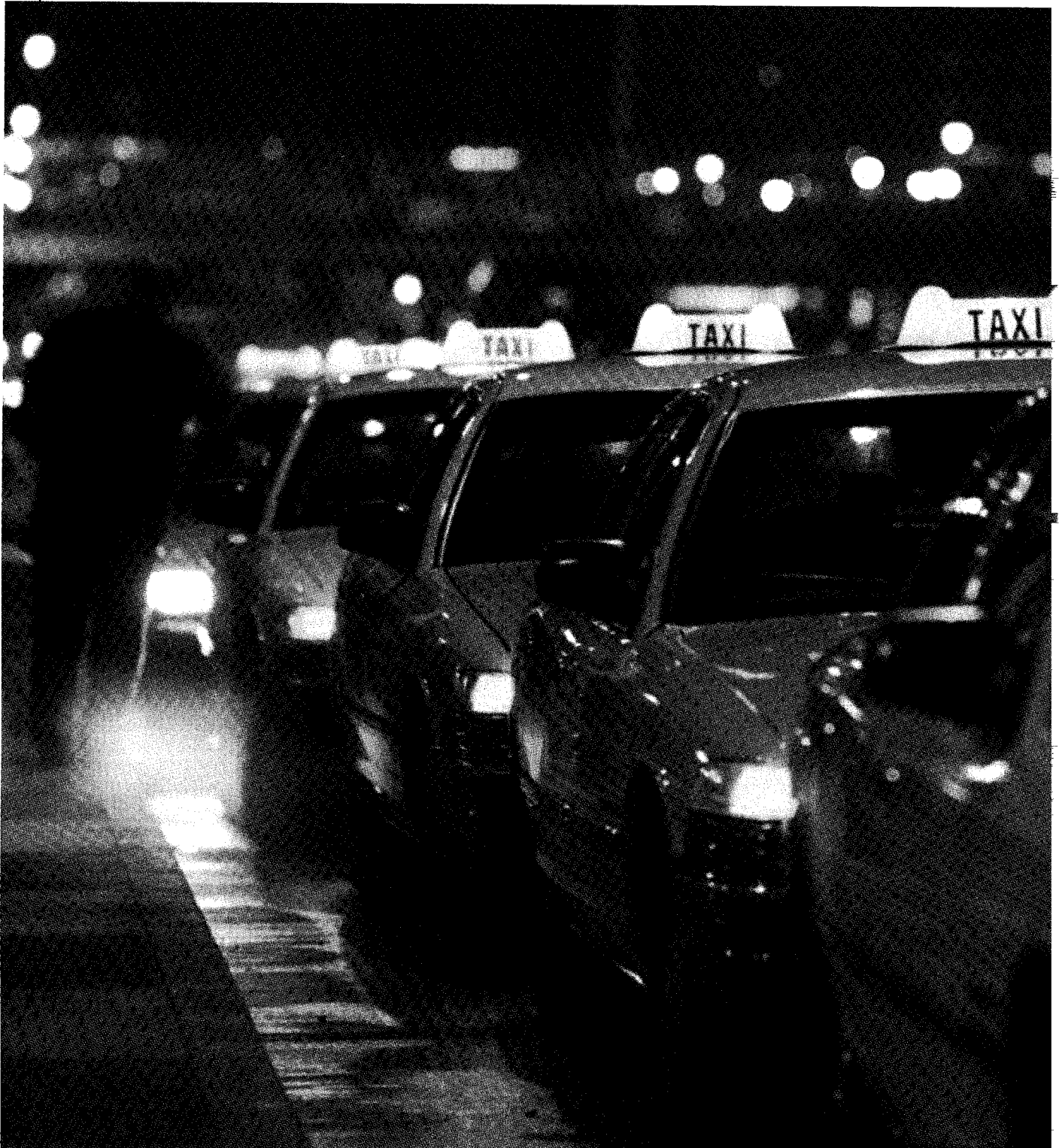
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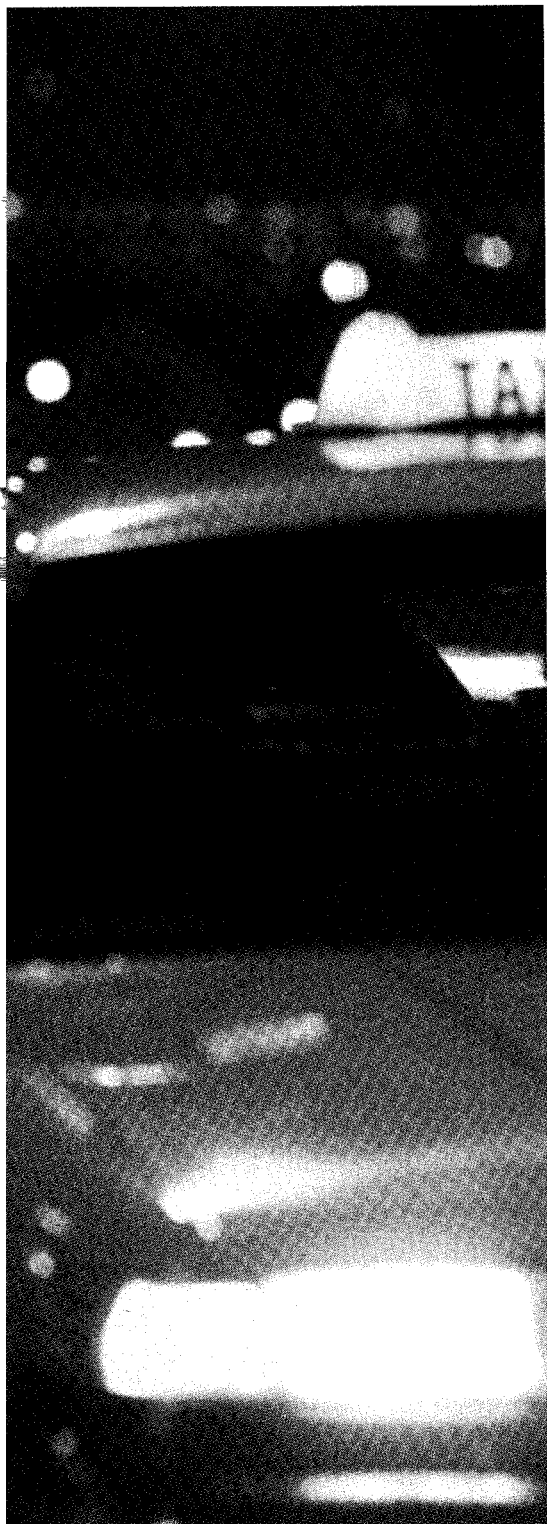


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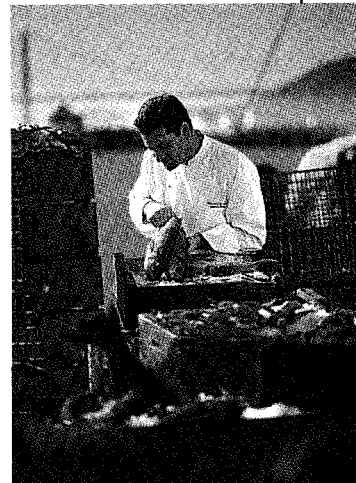


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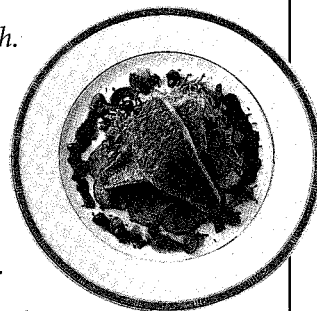


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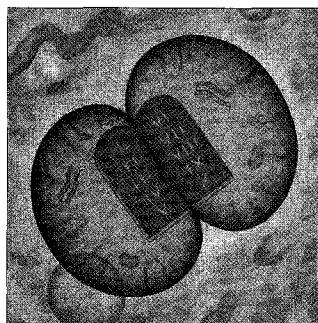
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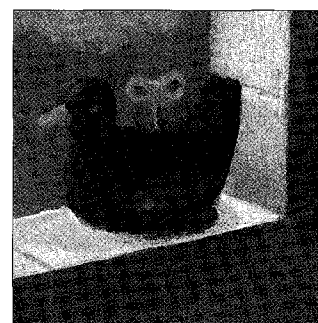
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William Shawn, the editor of *The New Yorker* from 1952 until 1987, profoundly shaped American literature, journalism, and criticism. Yet many who worked closely with Shawn knew little about his personal background. Shawn himself volunteered almost nothing. Now one of Shawn's longtime contributors has brought to light a peculiarly American saga. (Introduction by Ian Frazier.)

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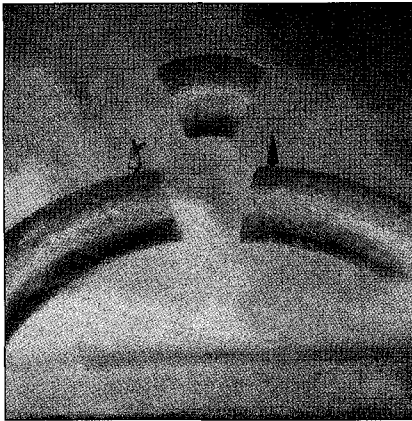
by Anne H. Soukhanov

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cover annual mammograms for all women over 40. We know what it costs, but by treating breast cancer in its earliest stages, we also know what it can save. ■ The best care can even halt the progression of chronic disease. Our congestive heart failure program provides a cardiac nurse to educate at-risk members on the importance of taking prescribed medications, and to help them make lifestyle adjustments. The result has been a significant decline in hospitalization rates and an overall improvement in patient well-being. ■ Not coincidentally, our model of prevention, early detection and chronic disease management promotes better health, with the added value of lowering health care costs. Which in turn enables companies such as ours to provide more people than ever the best choices modern medicine can offer. And do so without offering the one choice no one should ever again have to make: Their money? Or their health?



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## 77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

**G**REAT editors are never exactly alike. Edward Weeks, the extroverted ninth editor of this magazine (1938–1966), was clubbable, a golfer, and a fly-fisherman. He spent a lot of his time away from Boston, traveling, and once described himself as “the most cheerful lecturer on the circuit.” When he returned to the office, he would hold splendid editorial meetings at which he recited stories about prospects. One of these was Ved Mehta, a highly promising student whom Weeks encountered at Pomona College in 1954. Mehta was sure to attract notice: he was a native of Lahore, India, brilliantly accomplished despite having been blind from the age of four. He had written a substantial part of an autobiography, and Weeks encouraged him. Parts of it appeared in these pages, and the book was published in 1957 by Atlantic–Little, Brown, under the title *Face to Face*. Mehta went to Balliol College, Oxford, and, subsequently, to graduate work at Harvard, along the way writing about his return to India in *Walking the Indian Streets* (1960).

This book, which first appeared in *The New Yorker*, was edited by William Shawn, the editor of the magazine, a man as reclusive as Weeks was extroverted. In 1961 Shawn offered Mehta a position on the *New Yorker* staff, where Mehta remained for thirty-three years, writing for magazine and book

publication a series about Indian life in this century and, simultaneously, a remarkable cycle of seven autobiographical volumes about his life in India and his emigration. A few of these volumes deliberately retraced the years recounted in *Face to Face*, moving “by a commodious vicus of recirculation” back through Mehta’s earliest childhood and family life in India, and described, now in exquisite detail, the stages of his education. In the autobiographical books he once again approached his first encounters, forty years ago, with Edward Weeks and William Shawn. His portrait of Shawn in this issue is an advance adaptation from his new book, *Remembering Mr. Shawn’s New Yorker: The Invisible Art of Editing*, to be published next month by Overlook Press.

No one knows an editor better, or can write better about the art of editing, than the person edited—especially a man who once told an interviewer, “I am an amalgam of five cultures, Indian, British, American, blind, and *The New Yorker*.” It is in the special culture of Shawn’s *New Yorker* that the four other strains in Mehta’s writing life meet; now he describes the man who edited the articles that made the books that put a girdle round the earth, bringing Mehta’s India to the United States and putting his writings into print in Gujarati, Urdu, Marathi, and Hindi. —THE EDITORS

### CONTRIBUTORS

**Robert Dallek** (“Three New Revelations About LBJ”) is a professor of history at Boston University. His article in this issue is based on research for his book *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973*, to be published this month by Oxford University Press.

**Deborah Digges** (“Winter Barn”) is an associate professor of English at Tufts University. Her most recent book of poems is *Rough Music* (1995).

**Chitra B. Divakaruni** (“Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter”) received the 1995 American Book Award for fiction for *Arranged Marriage*, a collection of short stories. Her most recent novel is *The Mistress of Spices* (1997).

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**Ian Frazier** (Introduction to “*The New Yorker’s Mr. Shawn*”) is the author of *Family* (1994) and *Coyote v. Acme* (1996).

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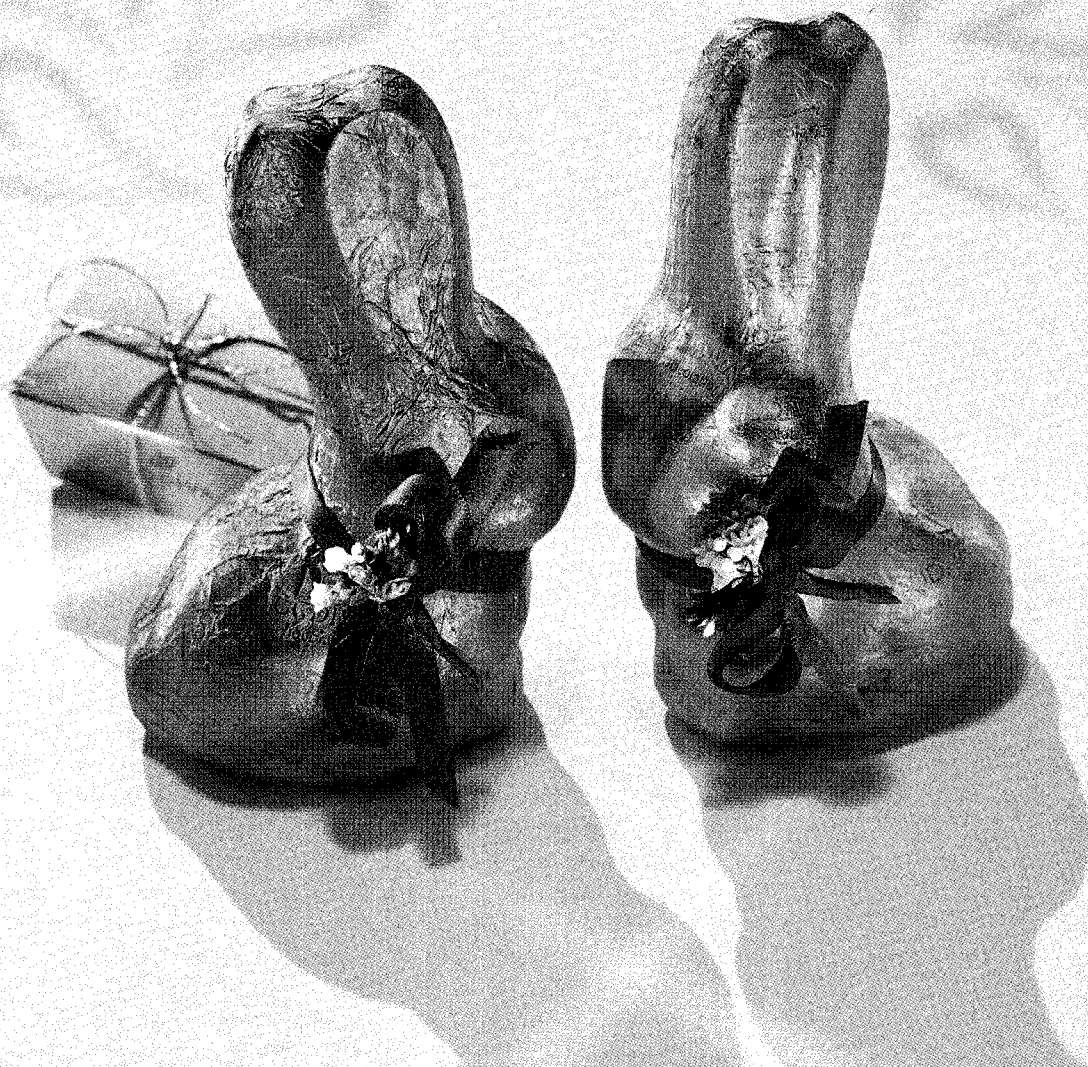
**Ved Mehta** (“*The New Yorker’s Mr. Shawn*”) is the author of twenty-one books.

**David Owen** (“Children and Money”) is the author of *The Walls Around Us* (1991) and *My Usual Game* (1995). He is an editor of *Lure of the Links* (1997), an anthology of golf stories.

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## LETTERS

### Climate Flip-flop

William H. Calvin's account of the possible coming climatic catastrophe ("The Great Climate Flip-flop," January *Atlantic*) is riveting—and scary. Calvin suggests many thoughtful, if horrendously expensive, measures that might modulate the forces bringing about an abrupt cooling of Europe. Curiously, neither he nor any other expert in the field seems to have considered an obvious and relatively straightforward solution: the construction in space of a physical barrier to intercept incoming solar radiation.

Although half the earth's surface receives solar radiation at all times, most of the insolation occurs over the Equator around noon. Away from the Equator and on either side of high noon the heat received falls off sharply.

A reflective barrier—sheets of aluminum foil, for instance—only a few square miles in area could measurably cut the sunlight received if placed directly over the Equator in a retrograde orbit, so as to keep it over a line joining the centers of the sun and the earth—that is, in a *cum sole* orbit.

If present computer models cannot accurately predict the precise impact of such a barrier, then the barrier could be constructed like venetian blinds, which would permit control of the incident solar radiation with greater finesse.

This may sound like science fiction, but we do have the experience and the expertise to study the feasibility of this approach. If it turns out to be feasible, its impact would be much more controllable than, say, nuclear blasts to blow up ice dams off Greenland's coast.

**Inayat I. Lalani**  
Fort Worth, Texas

William Calvin is a talented writer, but his article exhibits glaring errors. For example, referring to the timing of the last ice age, he says, "Scientists have

known for some time that the previous warm period started 130,000 years ago and ended 117,000 years ago." The interglacial (warm period) did indeed begin 130,000 years ago, but it lasted 60,000 years, not 13,000. The most recent ice age began 70,000 years ago and lasted till about 18,000 years ago. The study of Greenland's glacier from which Calvin quotes at length shows that Greenland was much warmer from 130,000 to 70,000 years ago. The level of the oxygen isotope <sup>18</sup>O in Greenland's ice is one of the most important measures of past cold and warm periods. As late as 90,000 years ago that level was higher than it is today, suggesting that the global climate was warmer even then.

**James M. Gillea**  
Bernardston, Mass.

William Calvin suggests that a "quick fix" may be possible to correct future fluctuations in the global climate. Undoubtedly, we should continue to fund paleoclimatological research in an effort to improve our understanding of the past and our predictions for the future. However, building bridges across fjords and using surfactants in the North Atlantic to enhance evaporation seem both impractical and futile. Such efforts to stabilize our environment are merely attempts to treat the plentiful symptoms of a relatively recent ailment—overpopulation. Our money would be better spent in efforts to stabilize the world's population, reduce energy consumption, and limit the influence of human beings on the atmosphere. As Calvin points out, nontechnological human beings have managed to withstand severe and often rapid climate change during the past 125,000 years. We should not fear our climate's natural ebb and flow nearly so much as our own contribution to its volatility.

**Kevin Winthrop**  
Portland, Oreg.



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**W**illiam Calvin's article described how greenhouse warming could lead to a drastic cooling, a catastrophe that could threaten the survival of civilization—reinforcing my view that predicting long-term changes in the earth's weather is an unbelievably complex job and that we should take these predictions with a grain of salt. A host of non-scientific reasons motivate the proponents of the global-warming theory to conclude that the sky is falling.

First of all, man's ability to affect the average temperature of the earth may be insignificant, since more than 98 percent of the earth's hothouse effect is due to dust and water vapor in the atmosphere, and most of the CO<sub>2</sub> in our atmosphere is not man-made but, rather, comes from natural sources. It's a bit of a stretch to conclude that the world is experiencing a global warming that is caused by the burning of fossil fuels, since most of the warming that occurred in this century took place before man began using enormous amounts of fossil fuel.

Second, as Calvin points out, the earth has always experienced temperature fluctuations, and it may simply be on its way back to its average temperature. Even the impact of higher levels of CO<sub>2</sub> on our environment is not clear; an increase in CO<sub>2</sub> might make the earth a more productive "garden of Eden."

**Chuck Boardman**  
*Saratoga, Calif.*

*William Calvin replies:*

Inayat I. Lalani suggests a space-engineering solution to overheating. But, as I repeatedly emphasized, gradual warming is not the only means by which the Nordic heat pump might fail and trip a catastrophic global cooling. That's why we must secure the bi-stable climate mechanism against all threats. Lalani's final sentence, concerning nuclear blasts, is a reckless exaggeration; blowing up ice dams across fjords needs only highway-construction amounts of explosive, because the exiting water does the rest of the work (that's how dams fail).

James Gildea confuses a "warm period" (defined by temperature) with an interglaciation (defined by the lack of ice sheets over Canada and Scandinavia). The best of the ice-core records from Greenland show a sharp cooling about 117,000 years ago, effectively ending the

prior warm period, but the ice sheets took a long time to return. Note that we can have ice-age-level temperatures without much ice (as happened 122,000 years ago), and we can temporarily have fairly warm temperatures even in the presence of massive ice sheets (as happened 15,000 years ago). Most of the climate flips last only a few centuries, so ice sheets do not change very much before the temperature flips back. Temperature flips are our big problem, not the ice; an abrupt cooling is like suddenly jacking up a landscape a few thousand feet into a mountainous climatic zone, causing the plants to die and be replaced first by weeds and then by colder-weather species. For modern human beings, whose population is dependent on maintaining efficient agriculture, it is a transition within a decade that is so catastrophic (given a slow temperature change over 500 years, we could probably cope). We probably cannot tolerate even a brief flip without civilization's toppling.

Kevin Winthrop asserts that climate-saving money would be better spent elsewhere, that we wouldn't have the problem except for overpopulation, and that our ancestors survived prior abrupt coolings. But a sudden reduction in the population (the most likely result of another abrupt cooling) through war, famine, and disease would leave a world of small despotic governments, each hating its neighbors because of genocidal warfare during the crash. We may be able to head that off. Mr. Winthrop may not fear the climate's "ebb and flow," but I certainly do, given how overextended and ignorant we are. Hunter-gatherers can move, but London can't.

Chuck Boardman confuses the issue of stabilizing abrupt climate change with the increasingly irrelevant debate about whether human beings are responsible for the past warming. Abrupt cooling is not the "prediction" that global warming originally was: what I described has happened many times before (every few thousand years), and we now know one way (gradual warming) in which it could happen again. I'm sorry that he denigrates the motives of scientists, because ignorance has traditionally given rise to expensive and miserable courses of action (consider medicine before we understood enough to craft vaccines and antibiotics). We currently do not know

what has kept the past 8,000 years free of abrupt flips; we badly need to know, so that we can figure out how to augment the stabilizing mechanisms.

## Global Open Society

**I**n "Toward a Global Open Society" (January *Atlantic*), George Soros identifies a number of prerequisites that are clear and achievable, but leaves one—perhaps the most important—unclear. That is the idea that the liberal democracies of the world should "forge a global network of alliances that could work with or without the United Nations." He cites NATO as an example. A confusing network of alliances designed to give coherence and security to both Western and Eastern Europe already exists, and NATO is a valid but unfortunate example. The world needs policing, but not as a priority in the military sense. We need to understand that hegemonic powers and spheres of influence are still a reality in the world. That reality cuts across ideological lines to include both liberal and illiberal powers. These are, primarily, Russia, China, Japan, France, Germany, England, and the United States. The European Union may come to replace France, Germany, and England, but for now those seven nations constitute world hegemony and should therefore be in congress in order to effectively supervise the many post-Cold War adjustments being made throughout the world.

**Ken Whelan**  
*San Francisco, Calif.*

**"A** global open society" on the U.S. capitalist model, which simultaneously provides for social welfare and consensus and regulation, is an admirable idea. But it is one for which the international community and many nation-states have been striving for years. It calls in large part for the reconciliation of opposites—free enterprise with government regulation, free expression with the preservation and "protection" of local values. This is a matter at best of delicate and dynamic balancing, at worst of trying to have and eat the same political cake.

**Jack Kessler**  
*San Francisco, Calif.*



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**G**eorge Soros's open society is not open enough—perhaps partly because a truly open society has come to seem inconceivable. “Open” calls for nonenclosure, freedom from definitions and dividing lines, no restrictions or limitations or barriers. The George Soros–Karl Popper model is enclosed by words, wallows in internal definitions and dividing lines, and—in establishing standards, enforcing fair labor practices, protecting human rights, and promulgating regulations to attain these objectives—requires restrictions, limitations, and barriers.

“As a conceptual framework, the open society is better than any blueprint, including the concept of perfect competition,” Soros writes. Very true. But the basic problem is treating “open society” as a conceptual framework. It needn't be. Indeed, to be truly open, the open society must be as much the consequence of historical trends as are closed societies—a category into which I would put our own—all around the world. A mainly conceptual open society like Soros and Popper's seems to me more than slightly ersatz.

In a sense the dominant trend of history since the thirteenth century has been the progressive closing of the world's societies. Perhaps George Soros should take a bit of time off to learn why, and to investigate the possibility—and the ways and means, as well as the desirability—of reversing this trend.

**Stephen Miles**  
Tucson, Ariz.

### No Middle Way

**P**aul Ehrlich and others come on like lions in arguing that present levels of consumption in the developed countries are unsustainable (“No Middle Way on the Environment,” December *Atlantic*). They cite the 1992 “World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity” that global sustainability requires people in the developed countries to “greatly *reduce* their overconsumption, if we are to reduce pressures on resources and the global environment” (emphasis added). But at the end of their article Ehrlich et al. go out like lambs. Instead of insisting that developed-country consumption be reduced, they approvingly quote the Nobel laureate economist James Meade saying that to avoid a future col-

lapse of the global system “it is necessary to restrain both *the rate of growth* of population and, at least in the developed countries, *the rate of growth* of consumption per head” (emphasis added).

It is one thing to say that sustainability requires an absolute fall in developed countries’ consumption. It is quite another to say that such consumption must grow at a slower rate. As a natural-resource and environmental economist, I agree with Meade that growth rates must come down. To believe otherwise would be to join those “cornucopians” of whom Ehrlich et al. are so scornful. But your readers should be aware that only a small minority of natural-resource and environmental economists believe that sustainability requires an absolute decline in consumption.

The force of the authors’ argument is greatly weakened by their failure to recognize that they have adopted two contradictory positions. Does sustainability of the global system require an absolute decline in consumption or only a slower rate of growth? They cannot have it both ways, and which way they go makes an enormous difference in thinking about the future of the global system.

**Pierre Crosson**  
*Resources for the Future*  
Washington, D.C.

**T**he sustainability of the earth’s natural systems is clearly a critical issue for every man, woman, and child on the planet. If we are unwilling to face up to and deal with overconsumption and environmental degradation, they may well eventually become life-threatening. However, Paul Ehrlich and his colleagues do a disservice to the debate.

Ehrlich et al. raise many valid points and cite many startling statistics. However, few of them are new, and the authors announce them with the same scare-mongering and extremist approach that lost Ehrlich credibility in the 1970s. Obviously, overconsumption poses a threat to the environment; obviously, finite resources will be depleted sooner if we consume them faster. My guess is that few reasonable educated people today believe that the current consumption patterns of the industrialized world can continue unabated and indefinitely. Likewise, most people realize that given the acceleration of history over the past

half century, extrapolation of longer-term historical trends is almost meaningless. Thus Ehrlich’s “Chicken Little” approach does little to move the debate forward, and in fact only spurs the “middle-of-the-roadism” that he criticizes. Perhaps, as the overline of Mark Sagoff’s earlier and more optimistic article “Do We Consume Too Much?” (June *Atlantic*) says, neither side has it right.

**R. Steven Maxwell**  
*Techknowledge Strategic Group*  
Boulder, Colo.

**I**would like to comment on the difference of opinion between Paul Ehrlich et al. and Mark Sagoff. Ehrlich and his co-authors are critical of Sagoff’s assertion that economic analysis of environmental issues is less important than aesthetic and moral arguments. Their reasoning is that ecosystems provide services worth trillions of dollars annually, and we need only incorporate these values in markets to correct excessive resource destruction or exploitation. Unfortunately, determining these values has proved difficult and controversial, and, as Sagoff recognizes, an important problem that economists wrestle with is how to treat aesthetic and moral values in an economic framework.

The importance of aesthetic and moral arguments is also highlighted when we move from analyst to activist. Indeed, pricing nonmarket goods and internalizing environmental costs would lead to a more efficient economy and greater environmental protection, but we all know that the policy process is not entirely rational. Public opinion drives policy, and public concern for the environment is based primarily on aesthetic and moral values. Passage of the Endangered Species Act, for example, was possible only because politicians and the public considered its purpose to be the protection of “charismatic mega-fauna.” Only more recently, as the law has become more controversial, has it been evoked to pursue grander ecosystem goals. Yes, as Ehrlich et al. point out, the objective of maintaining healthy ecosystems and their services should be paramount, but when it comes to thinking about environmental policy, we need to recognize the importance of aesthetic and moral arguments.

**Matthew Kotchen**  
Ann Arbor, Mich.



## First Lady

The origin of "First Lady" lies further back than J. E. Lighter ("Taking Notice of POTUS," October *Atlantic*) or William E. Thoms (Letters, January *Atlantic*) asserts. It was first used in 1863, in reference to Mary Todd Lincoln, by William Howard Russell, a British correspondent in the United States, in *My Diary North and South*. Mary Clemmer Ames, a journalist, used the phrase in 1877 to describe Lucy Hayes. But it really came into the language in 1911, when Charles Nirdlinger's comedy about Dolly Madison, *The First Lady in the Land*, opened at the Gaiety Theatre in New York City.

**Harold Faber**  
Ancram, N.Y.

William E. Thoms writes that "First Lady" was used in the 1931 musical *Of Thee I Sing*. There were, however, isolated uses of the term in the nineteenth century. According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, it appeared as early as 1834, and according to the *Random House Dictionary*, in 1850–1855. *Brewer's Politics* asserts that Zachary Taylor (1784–1850) said of Dolly Madison, "She was truly our First Lady for half a century."

**Gordon A. Tubbs**  
Arlington, Va.

*J. E. Lighter replies:*

No early citation I have seen features "First Lady" as a two-word title. Instead all convey the simple, literal idea of "foremost lady (among many)." An 1834 writer observed that "the lowest mortal," once elected, "may . . . have the choice of the first lady in the land."

William Howard Russell was quoting a columnist's reference to Mrs. Lincoln as "the first [sic] Lady in the Land." He overheard the regal Varina Davis, the wife of Jefferson Davis, described as "the first lady in the Confederate States."

More recently, Helen Hayes was publicized as "first lady of the American theater," and Kate Smith as "the first lady of American song": each pre-eminent, neither a White House occupant.

As the recognized title of the President's wife, plain "First Lady" appears to have become newsroom lingo only after 1930. And as for the misleading *Brewer's* quote, not even Eleanor Roosevelt was the "First Lady" for half a century.



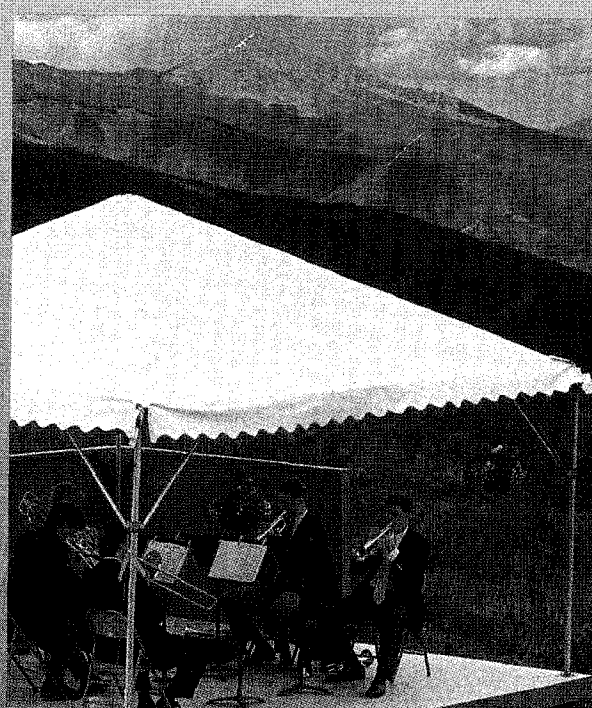
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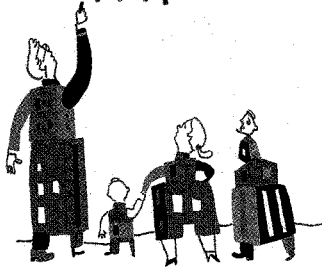
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# THE APRIL ALMANAC



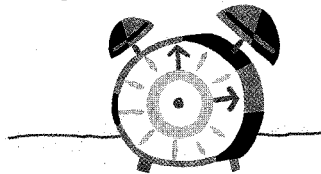
## Demographics

This month the U.S. Bureau of the Census begins a rehearsal for Census 2000, which will include various new means of arriving at a count, in addition to the traditional methods of collecting forms by mail and tracking down nonresponders door to door. The new methods are intended to contain costs and improve accuracy. The rehearsal will take place in Sacramento, California; the Menominee Indian Reservation, in Wisconsin; and Columbia, South Carolina, and 11 surrounding counties. In California and Wisconsin census takers will for the first time ever employ statistical sampling—using data about part of a population to estimate the number and characteristics of the rest—instead of door-to-door visits. This part of the rehearsal has been hotly contested, especially by congressional Republicans, who argue that the Constitution calls for an actual head count—and are no doubt mindful that those likely to be added by sampling are in low-income, generally Democratic neighborhoods.

## Arts & Letters

April 1: "Splendors of Versailles," an exhibit of more than 140 items from the Château de Versailles, near Paris, opens today in the Mississippi Arts Pavilion, in Jackson. This is the largest collection of treasures from Versailles ever shown outside the palace itself. It joins a growing number of exhibits organized by area businesses and state and local govern-

ments in midsize U.S. cities that lack major art museums; the organizers borrow art from foreign institutions and create elaborate installations for it, generally in convention centers or buildings converted from other uses. Such shows can be extremely lucrative—a 1996 exhibit of art and artifacts from St. Petersburg palaces brought some \$61 million to Mississippi in ticket sales and in tax and tourist dollars—and some have gone on to tour established museums. One critic has called them "a cross between an art museum and a theme-park"; organizers say they offer the closest thing to seeing art in its original settings.

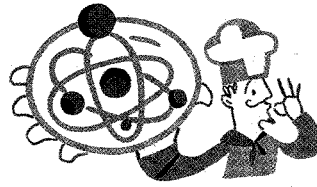


## The Skies

April 1: The waxing crescent Moon lies near the reddish star Aldebaran in the west at sunset. 5: At 2:00 A.M. Daylight Saving Time begins. Set clocks ahead one hour. 11: Full Moon, also known this month as the Sprouting Grass Moon and the Little Frogs Croak Moon. 23: Venus appears practically on top of Jupiter in the eastern sky shortly before sunrise, with the crescent Moon very close nearby. Such a tight grouping of these three bodies has not been visible from the United States for decades.

## Food

This month three major U.S. food and agricultural associations begin a public-awareness campaign designed to reassure consumers about the safety of irradiated meat—meat that has been exposed to tiny amounts of nuclear energy in order to kill pathogens such as *E. coli* and salmonella. The Food and Drug Administration approved the irradiation of red



meat—a process that does not make it radioactive—last year, because of the growing number of illnesses and deaths from contaminants. Irradiation is not new: it was developed in the 1950s and has been approved for a variety of foods. However, because of the public's wariness, it has rarely been used. The process has encountered stiff opposition from consumer groups, who argue that it not only affects the taste and appearance of food but destroys minerals and vitamins, and adds trace amounts of benzene, a carcinogen. All irradiated foods, including meat, must be labeled as such.

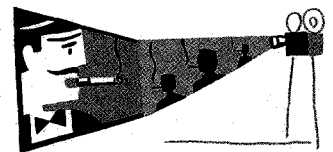
## Health & Safety

A number of studies of alternative therapies for breast cancer begin this month in Canada. They will be funded by the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Initiative, a partnership of several major health organizations. Therapies that may be examined include relaxation exercises; Reiki, a Tibetan energy-channeling healing technique; and substances thought to affect cancer cells or the immune system, such as soy milk, vitamin A, C, and E supplements, flaxseed, green tea, and Iscador, a kind of mistletoe. Researchers will be evaluating such things as the safety and effectiveness of these therapies along with their interactions with conventional treatments. Although alternative therapies have been tried by large numbers of breast-cancer patients, the Canadian studies constitute one of the first large-scale attempts to assess their value.



## Government

This month the 29 nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, along with five others, will ask their legislatures to ratify a treaty outlawing the bribing of foreign officials. This action marks a victory for the United States, which outlawed foreign bribery in 1978 but has up to now failed to persuade others to follow suit; until recently about half the nations in the OECD, including France, Germany, and Greece, even considered foreign bribes to be a tax-deductible business expense. U.S. companies have long complained that they lose billions of dollars annually in contracts to overseas rivals who engage in bribery.



## 50 Years Ago

Giles Playfair, writing in the April, 1948, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "The stage (or screen) aspirant whose . . . zest to learn how to act . . . is slight . . . may take heart. . . . For today, if one may judge from the exquisitely natural performances that are the fashion, there is hardly an emotion that cannot be portrayed . . . by an appropriate use of tobacco. . . ."

"Concentration (especially after moment of creative inspiration): Put aside a lighted pipe absentmindedly. . . ."

"Acute distress or shock on receiving bad news: Crush out a half-smoked cigarette with awful finality. Stand quite still, keeping hand on butt of cigarette and head lowered, thus obviating need to reveal facial expression to audience. . . ."

"Courage: Light a cigarette at every moment of danger. . . . Male characters of the Tough American Hero school . . . should take cigarette directly with mouth from a pack of cigarettes."







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Years later, studies by Mississippi State University clearly prove that it did. Today, the wetland is still a habitat, nursery and feeding ground for a variety of wildlife. Typically, our technology is used to affect our balance sheet. But when we consider the continued loss of wetlands in America, few projects have been more rewarding than this one.

*Adjacent to our refinery in southern Mississippi is a tidal wetland we designed and built. This warm, buzzing place interconnects a wondrous web of life - from mullet, crabs and periwinkles to heron and alligators - proving that wetlands can actually be created from scratch. For more on how we did it, visit us at [www.chevron.com](http://www.chevron.com).*



People Do.

# Children and Money

*Turning childish greed  
into grown-up capitalism*

**P**ARENTS who decide that the time has come to teach their children about money usually begin by opening savings accounts. The kids are intrigued at first by the notion that a bank will pay them for doing nothing, but their enthusiasm disappears when they realize that the interest rate is minuscule and, furthermore, their parents don't intend to give them access to their principal. To a kid, a savings account is just a black hole that swallows birthday checks.

*Kid:* "Grandma gave me twenty-five dollars!"

*Parent:* "How nice. We'll put that check straight into your savings account."

*Kid:* "But she gave it to me! I want it!"

*Parent:* "Oh, it will still be yours. You just have to keep it in the bank so that it can grow."

*Kid (suspicious):* "What do you mean 'grow'?"

*Parent:* "Well, if you leave your twenty-five dollars in the bank for just one year, the bank will pay you *seventy-five cents*. And if you leave all of *that* in the bank for just one *more* year, the bank will give you another seventy-five cents plus two and a half more cents besides. That's called compound interest. It will help you go to college."

The main flaw in such saving schemes is that there's nothing in them for the kids. College is a thousand years away, and they probably think they'd just as soon stay home anyway. Indeed, the true purpose of such plans is usually not to promote saving but to prevent consumption. Appalled by what their children spend on candy and video games (or, rather, appalled by the degree to which their children's profligacy seems to mimic their own), parents devise stratagems for impounding their children's resources. Not surprisingly, kids quickly decide that large sums aren't real money and that all cash

should either be spent immediately or hidden in a drawer.

To avoid this problem with my two children, I started my own bank. It's called the First National Bank of Dave. I set up an account for each child, using the same computer program

I use to keep track of my checkbook. Because

I wanted my kids' deposits to grow at a pace that would hold their attention, I offered an attractive interest rate—five percent a month. Compounded, that works out to an annual rate of more than 70 percent. (No, I don't accept deposits from strangers.) Allowances are deposited automatically on the first day of each month. The kids can make other deposits, or withdrawals, whenever they like.

The Bank of Dave, which has been in operation four years, instantly turned both my children into ardent savers. My son still comes to me with change he has found on the floor of the car, saying, "And credit this today." Both kids' accounts grew so fast that after two years I had to roll back my monthly interest rate to three percent. The kids squawked when I announced the change, but they nodded solemnly when I explained that the law of supply and demand applies even to the supply of money. The kids help me calculate their interest—a useful lesson in averaging and percentages. I give them unlimited access to their funds, no questions asked, and I provide printed statements on demand.

The high rate of interest is not the only attractive feature of the Bank of Dave. Equally important from the kids' point of view is that their accounts belong to them. When they save, they reap the benefit; when they want to spend, they don't need permission. Children who have no control over their own funds have no incentive not to beg for money and then squander every dollar that comes into their hands. If your own income consisted solely of what you were able to beg from a fickle and inscrutable boss, you would wheedle too.

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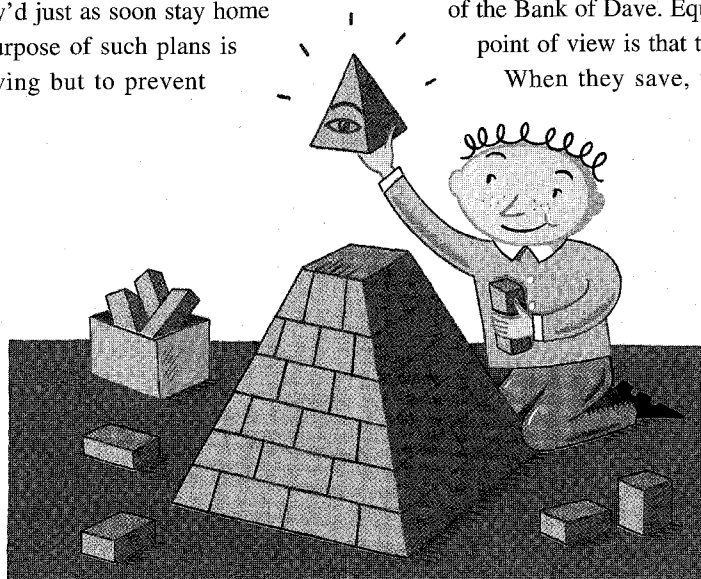
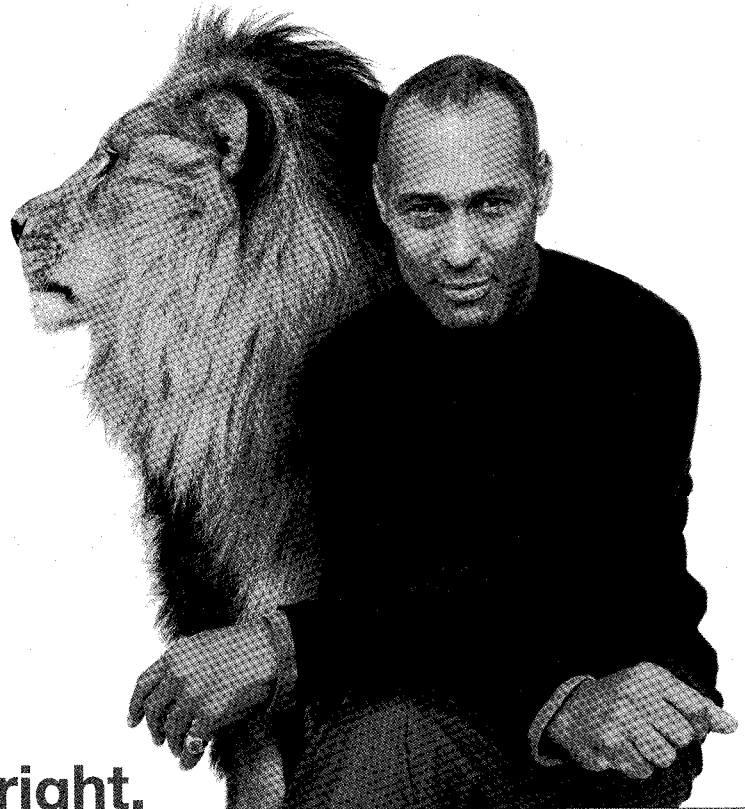


Illustration by David Hitch

APRIL 1998





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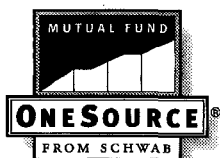
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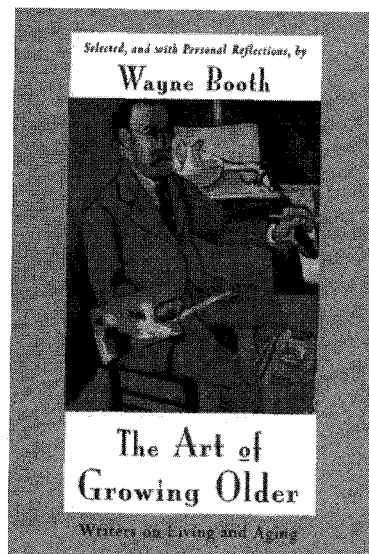
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The way to help children become rational consumers is to give them more control, not less. Before we go on vacation, I'll usually give my kids an extra twenty bucks or so, which I deposit in their accounts. I tell them that they can spend the extra money on a T-shirt, save it, spend it before we leave, or do anything else they want with it—but that while we are on vacation, they won't receive any additional pocket money from me (except in the form of communal purchases considered by custom to be vacation entitlements, such as candy, ice cream, movie tickets, and so on). Because any money they spend starts out as theirs, not mine, they think twice before throwing it away. In a souvenir store on Martha's Vineyard a couple of summers ago my son quietly studied the unpromising merchandise while a friend of his loudly cajoled his parents into paying five dollars for a toy tomahawk, which fell apart almost before we got back to the car. My son ended up spending thirty-three cents for an unopened geode, which he later opened by whacking it with a hammer—a good value, even from my jaded perspective. If he had been spending my money instead of his, he undoubtedly would have wanted a toy tomahawk instead.

Lately I've been thinking that it might be interesting to teach my kids about the stock market. The problem is how to do it in a way that gives them a reason to care about the results. Among the difficulties: transaction costs make it silly to buy and sell small numbers of shares; imaginary trading is no fun; and giving a nine-year-old discretionary authority over a real portfolio would be crazy, not to mention illegal.

I think I've hit on a solution: the Dave Stock Exchange. It will reside in my computer, alongside the Bank of Dave, and will deal in derivative securities—stocks that rise and fall in lockstep with real stocks but are denominated in pennies instead of dollars. Thus on a recent day a share of Intel would have traded on the D.S.E. for eighty-one cents instead of eighty-one dollars, and a hundred shares of McDonald's could have been had for \$48.50—the price of a single share on Wall Street. I will serve as the market-maker for all the stocks traded on my exchange, so that no real

shares will have to be bought or sold. I'll start my kids with stakes of, say, a hundred dollars each. They will be able to invest this money as they wish, and to make additional investments (or liquidate their positions) whenever they like. They will be able to monitor their holdings—from minute to minute, if they choose—using any of a number of portfolio-tracking utilities available online. The stocks will be imaginary, but not to them. If they sell fifty shares of Microsoft at \$1.43 apiece, I will pay them \$71.50—money that will be theirs to reinvest or spend.

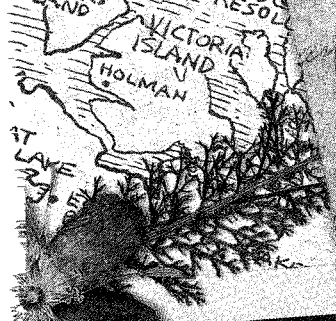
The only problem with this plan—and the reason I haven't implemented it yet—is that the rate of interest currently offered by my bank is more than four times the historical return on stocks. Any rational investor would close out a stock-trading account immediately and throw the proceeds into the Bank of Dave. As my system is set up at the moment, there is no incentive for my kids not to keep their entire net worth in cash.

One solution might be to place a limit on the size of interest-bearing accounts in the Bank of Dave. Funds over a certain threshold—\$200, say—could be swept automatically into a brokerage account at Dave & Co., where the money could either be invested in securities or left to earn interest at money-market rates. Another option might be simply to let the Bank of Dave die a natural death. This is already happening in the case of my daughter. She is a teenager now, and has decided that she needs the privacy afforded by a real bank account. She has negotiated an increase in her allowance to compensate for the interest she will be giving up, and she has ordered checks. I view this as a healthy development. A real checking account is useful, and I can't afford to keep paying three percent a month to someone who babysits.

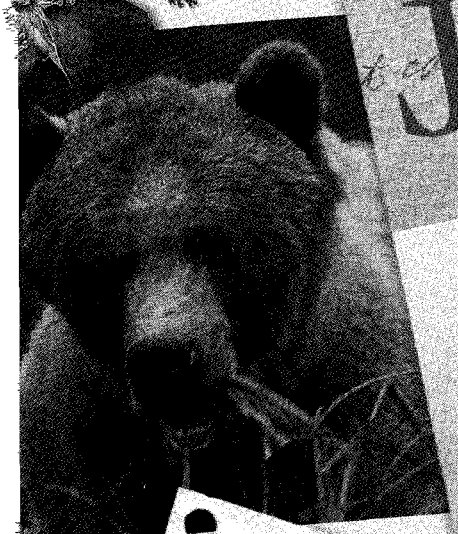
Children are instinctive capitalists. If given enough leeway, they quickly become shrewd managers of their own finances. When parents fail in their efforts at fiscal education, it's usually because for reasons of their own they have managed to make saving seem punitive and dull. Money is fun, and it's almost entirely self-explanatory. The only way to teach kids to adopt a long-term perspective is to give them a short-term incentive for doing so. ☺



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## The Trouble With Single-Sex Schools

*All-female schools are “models of equivocation,” the author, a Smith graduate, writes. They “reinforce regressive notions of sex difference” while at the same time helping women into the professions*

**A**ERICAN women won the opportunity to be educated nearly a hundred years before they won the right to vote, not coincidentally. In the beginning women were educated for the sake of family and society: the new republic needed educated mothers to produce reasonable, responsible

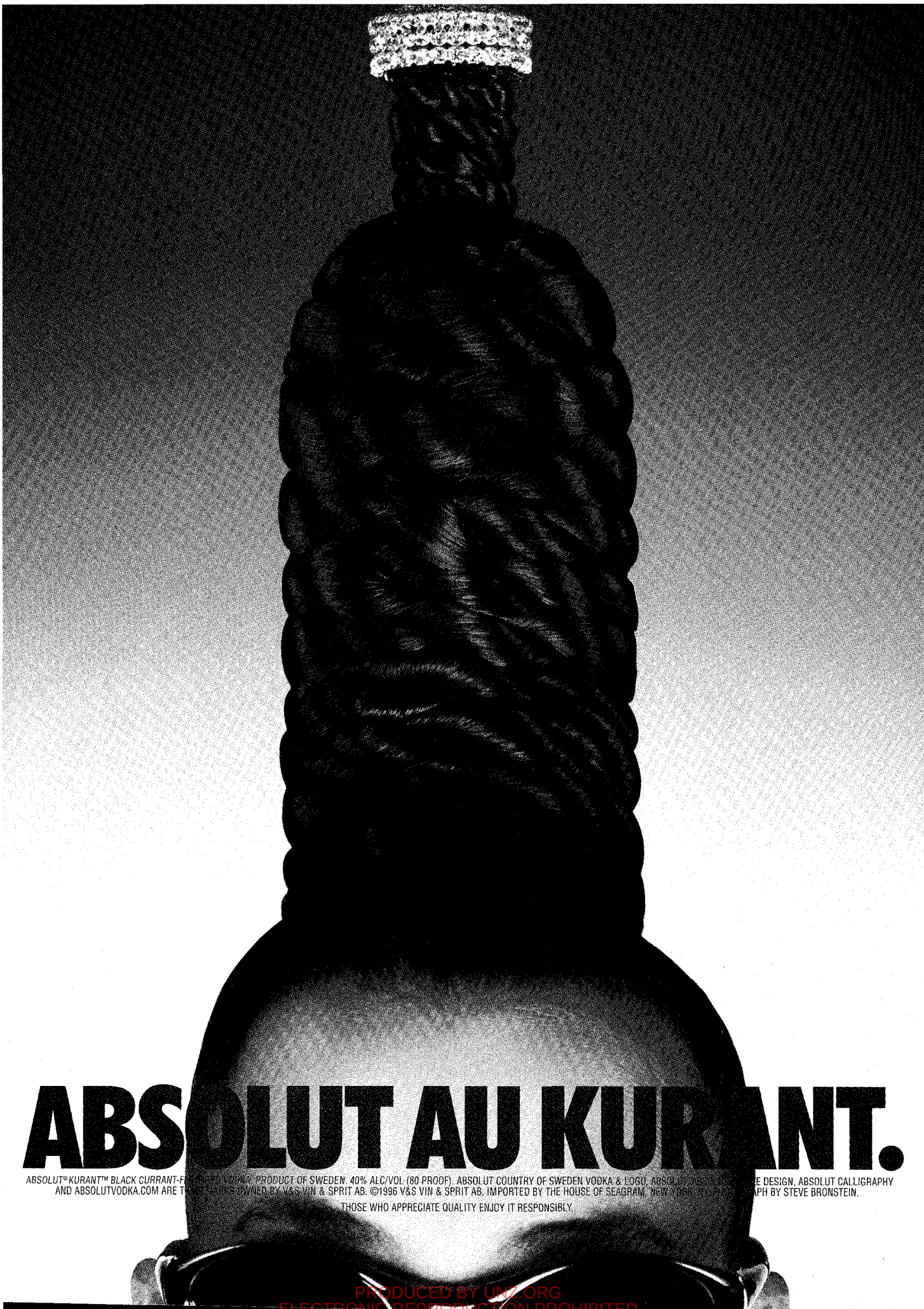
by **Wendy Kaminer**

male citizens. But although the first all-female academies, founded in the early 1800s, reflected a commitment to traditional gender roles, which reserved the public sphere for men, they reinforced a nascent view of women as potentially reasonable human beings—endowed with the attributes of citizenship.

Education also contributed to women's restlessness and impatience with domesticity. It may or may not have produced better mothers, but it did seem to produce fewer mothers. Young female secondary-school graduates of the mid-1800s tended to marry later than their uneducated peers or not at all. “Our failures only marry,” the president of Bryn Mawr, M. Carey Thomas, famously remarked in the early 1900s.

The first generations of educated women were products of single-sex secondary and undergraduate schools, with few exceptions (Oberlin became the country's first coed college, in 1837). The Seven Sisters opened their doors in the last decades of the nineteenth century and evolved into a female Ivy League, educating the daughters of elites and providing social and professional mobility to some members of the middle class. Such schools were essential to the nineteenth-century women's movement. They not only inspired activism in women and prepared them to work outside the home but also created wage-earning work, as





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schoolteaching became one of few respectable professional options for unmarried females.

Still, single-sex education was not exactly a choice; it was a cultural mandate at a time when sexual segregation was considered only natural. Early feminists hoped eventually to integrate men's schools as well as voting booths, and equal educational opportunities proved much easier to obtain than equal electoral rights. By the turn of the century more girls than boys were graduating from high school and coeducation was becoming the norm. In 1910, out of the nation's 1,083 colleges 27 percent were exclusively for men, 15 percent exclusively for women, and the remaining 58 percent coed.

Today females outnumber males among college graduates, and a mere 1.3 percent of all women awarded B.A. degrees graduate from single-sex colleges. Now that the Ivy League is coed, academically elite women's colleges—Smith, Wellesley, Mount Holyoke—are apt to lose the best-credentialed students to schools like Harvard, Brown, and Yale. In the 1970s, after men's colleges and universities began accepting women, the SAT scores of Smith College applicants declined; they stabilized and rose slightly during the 1980s.

The image of women's colleges has improved in the past five years, thanks partly to Hillary Rodham Clinton, Wellesley class of 1969. Applications to women's schools have steadily increased—but so has the number of college applicants overall. It's highly unlikely that with competition from the Ivy League and in the aftermath of the Sexual Revolution, women's colleges will ever recover the popularity and prestige they once enjoyed. Only about three percent of female high school seniors even consider attending any of the nation's eighty-two women's colleges. But if single-sex college education seems to generate relatively low demand among young women, support for it is on the increase among their elders.

Having gained entry to virtually all the nation's public and private universities (and military academies), many women are questioning the benefits of coeducation at every level, but especially in secondary schools. According to popular feminist wisdom, coed schools are detrimental to the self-esteem of girls;

they discourage rather than inspire girls' achievement, particularly in math and science. Many parents of girls seem to share these beliefs—or they want their daughters protected from the attentions and temptations of boys. (For gay and bisexual girls, however, single-sex schools can be fraught with sexual tension.) All-girls elementary and secondary schools are in the midst of a “renaissance,” according to Whitney Ransome, the director of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools. Since the early 1990s applications have increased by 21 percent and four new all-girls secondary schools have been established.

Pursuant to federal law, single-sex education is primarily a private prerogative; public schools are generally barred from discriminating on the basis of sex or race. But separatism has been enjoying a resurgence among some feminists and advocates of racial justice, who are challenging restrictions on segregated public classrooms. The belief that segregation necessarily sends a message of inferiority, which underlay the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, has been upended. Now segregated schools are heralded for raising self-esteem in disadvantaged groups.

Of course, integrationists still have the law on their side. In 1991 three public schools proposed for African-American males in Detroit were quickly and successfully challenged in a federal district court by the parents of girls in the city's public schools, along with a coalition of feminist and civil-rights groups. In that suit, *Garrett v. Board of Education*, the court held that the all-boys schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment and federal equal-education laws. Supporters of these schools characterized them as a response to a crisis facing young African-American males, who as a group suffered inordinately high dropout, unemployment, and homicide rates. But, as the court observed, there was no evidence that the presence of girls in class increased the risks faced by boys or interfered with efforts to help them: “Although co-educational programs have failed, there is no showing that it is the co-educational factor that results in failure.” Besides, girls were in crisis as well. Sex was “inappropriately” invoked as a “proxy for ‘at risk’ students.”

Undeterred by this decision, advo-

cates for single-sex education recently established a public all-girls school in New York City. Named The Young Women's Leadership School, and known informally as the East Harlem Girls' School, it opened in September of 1996 with one seventh-grade class of fifty girls, and was immediately challenged by the New York Civil Liberties Union, the New York City chapter of the National Organization for Women, and the New York Civil Rights Coalition.

*According to popular  
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self-esteem of girls.*

Last September the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights issued an informal preliminary finding that the school appeared to violate federal law. Two remedies were suggested: sexually integrate the school or establish a separate but equal school for boys. (The State of California has recently initiated a pilot program encouraging the establishment of single-sex academies for middle and high school students.) But New York City's school chancellor, Rudy Crew, has said that he will neither admit boys to the East Harlem Girls' School nor establish a brother school, and civil-rights activists would fight attempts to establish a separate but equal boys' academy anyway. Compromise appears unlikely. The battle rages between those who pursue equality through integration and those who pursue it through separate institutions for the presumptively disadvantaged.

Supporters of the East Harlem school have cast the debate as a class struggle. The school serves Latinas from lower-income families, and Latina activists have denounced its opponents, NOW in particular, as upper-middle-class meddlers out of touch with the needs of less-affluent minorities. The image of NOW as a group of elite feminists does not reflect reality (Anne Connors, the former



president of the New York chapter, observed that the average income of members was \$20,000), but wealth is relative. As outsiders to the East Harlem community, NOW activists may be "meddling"—but so were northerners who fought for an end to Jim Crow laws in the South. A commitment to civil rights assumes a responsibility to meddle.

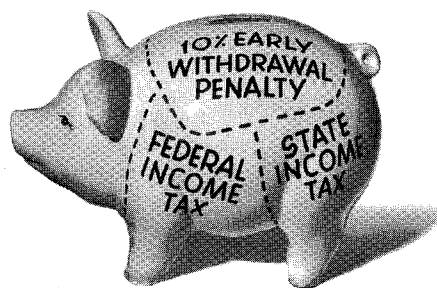
Of course, whether the establishment of public all-girls schools retards or advances civil rights and social equality is a central question in this case. Supporters of The Young Women's Leadership School assert that it provides low-income families with the option of single-sex education that has always existed for the upper classes. Rich parents send their daughters to all-female schools; why shouldn't the daughters of the poor enjoy similar advantages?

That's an appeal bound to elicit sympathy, especially from guilty liberals, but it begs the question of whether the daughters of the rich benefit from single-sex education. Perhaps they benefit merely from being rich and attending elite private schools with favorable student-teacher ratios and superior facilities and curricula. Perhaps many would fare better at elite coed schools. In any case, the tendency of some affluent parents to choose single-sex schools is not evidence that single-sex education provides advantages for girls. The traditions of the rich, such as coming-out parties, are not necessarily progressive.

In fact, challengers of the East Harlem school charge that its establishment is part of a campaign by conservative elites to dismantle the public school system through privatization. The school was conceived and partly funded by Ann Rubenstein Tisch and her husband, Andrew Tisch, the chairman of the Loews Corporation management committee. It represents the initiative and ideals of upper-class meddlers, whose motives the middle-class meddlers suspect.

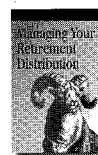
Does The Young Women's Leadership School represent a small step toward the goal of equality or a step away from it? The more that girls' schools are celebrated for nurturing achievement and self-esteem, the more futile efforts to improve public coeducation may seem. And feminist supporters of girls' schools are often opposed to boys' schools, so the prospect of success presents them

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with a quandary: which girls will be sacrificed to coed schools in the hope of socializing the boys?

**T**HE debate over single-sex education is complicated, and replete with the usual ironies: The Young Women's Leadership School can count among its defenders feminists who opposed single-sex admissions policies at the state-run Virginia Military Institute and anti-feminists who supported the exclusion of women from VMI and the Citadel. Feminist supporters of the East Harlem school distinguish its establishment as affirmative action, intended to remedy the discrimination that girls are said to encounter in coed classrooms—and in having been excluded from schools like VMI. Thus conservative advocates of the East Harlem school, who generally oppose affirmative action, find themselves defending one putative form of it. Conservatives who are generally unsympathetic to arguments about self-esteem, dismissing them as an expression of liberal "victimism," find themselves extolling the virtues of a nurturing, supportive environment that builds girls' confidence and capacity to lead. In their defense of girls' schools, however, they rely primarily on a traditional belief that maintaining separate schools for males

special needs of girls lambasted VMI for arguing that the special needs and sensibilities of young women made them unlikely to succeed in the harsh, highly competitive environment of a military academy. Feminists who complain about the male ethic that pervades law-school classrooms and male learning styles that are inimical to women suddenly, when the integration of VMI was at issue, started talking about the capacity of women to compete with men as equals in presumptively masculine environments.

In defense of male exclusivity, witnesses for VMI spouted popular feminist truths: women are less aggressive and more emotional, more cooperative and less competitive, than men. To substantiate these assertions and justify separation of the sexes, the state relied on Carol Gilligan's work on female moral development, which, of course, is regularly cited by feminists to support the exclusion of males from institutions like The Young Women's Leadership School.

In addition to assumptions about female learning and relational styles, proponents of all-girls schools rely on social science to support the claim that segregation by sex fosters achievement in girls. "Studies show . . ." is the usual lead-in to any defense of single-sex education. In fact studies do not show that girls fare better in single-sex schools. "There does not seem to be research support for this perspective," the sociologist Cynthia Epstein politely observes. Epstein, the author of *Deceptive Distinctions: Sex, Gender, and the Social Order* (1988), adds that there is no consensus among psychologists as to the existence of psychological or cognitive differences between the sexes, and that the evidence for the need for single-sex education and the justice of single-sex schools is highly equivocal.

Many social science studies [of sex-based differences] do not support the idea that deep-rooted male and female natures require separate education, or that segregated education can provide members of each sex with the same opportunities and development of skills.

What, then, is the basis for the claim that "studies show" the advantages of all-female schools? Perhaps the most frequently cited studies were conducted by M. Elizabeth Tidball, who reviewed the educational backgrounds of female

achievers. In her first, widely cited study, published in 1973, Tidball examined a random sample of women included in *Who's Who* and found that disproportionate numbers were graduates of women's colleges. In subsequent studies Tidball found that women's colleges produced more than their share of graduates who went on to medical school or received doctorates in the natural or life sciences.

**W**HAT do these studies tell us about the relationship between single-sex education and achievement? Virtually nothing. Tidball made the common mistake of confusing correlation with causation. As Faye Crosby, a professor of psychology at Smith College, and other critics have observed, Tidball did not control for characteristics of women's colleges, apart from sexual homogeneity, that might well account for the success of their graduates. She did not allow for the socio-economic privileges shared by many graduates of elite women's colleges or for the selectivity of the schools.

Tidball's 1973 study focuses on women who graduated from women's colleges in the years before elite men's colleges were integrated; until the mid-1970s ambitious, high-achieving females gravitated to Seven Sister schools because they were among the most selective and prestigious institutions open to women. Students at these schools were self-selected for success, like their male counterparts in the Ivy League. They also tended to be well connected; many may have owed their success to the males present in their families more than to the absence of males from their classes.

Tidball's subsequent finding, that single-sex schools produce more female achievers in the sciences and medicine, also collapses under scrutiny. Faye Crosby and her Smith colleagues found in a comparison of similarly selective single-sex and coeducational schools that "women's colleges are not more productive." There are no definitive comparative data on the benefits of single-sex colleges for women. "Data are slim," Crosby writes, "but they indicate that coeducational schools are as likely to produce women scientists as are women's colleges."

Crosby's assertion challenges conventional wisdom about the risks of coeducation which is becoming increasingly

(Continued on page 34)

*"Studies show. . ." is the usual lead-in to a defense of single-sex education. But studies do not "show."*

and females is only natural, considering presumed differences in their developmental needs and learning styles.

It is this belief in cognitive and characterological sex-based differences that unites conservative and liberal advocates of single-sex education—at least when the exclusion of males is at issue. Feminism is inconsistent on the subject of sex-based differences. Some of the same women who praise The Young Women's Leadership School for attending to the



APRIL  
1998

# Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

PREVIEW

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From the  
Heartland

## POPULAR MUSIC

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Folk With an  
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## CLASSICAL

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"Last Symphony"

## FILM

Takeshi Kitano's  
*Fireworks*

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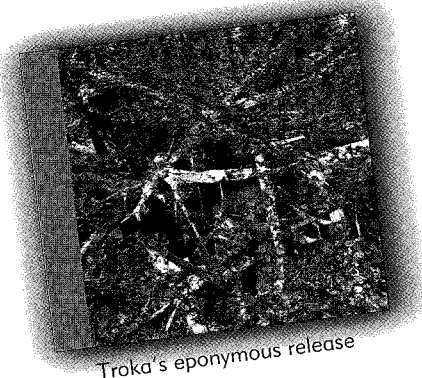


# Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

## FINLAND'S FINEST

For most of the nineties Scandinavia has had one hot folk-rock music scene that isn't getting enough appreciation in the rest of the world. NorthSide, a small label out of Minneapolis ([www.noside.com](http://www.noside.com)), has been trying to rectify this injustice by releasing the albums of such brilliant bands as Garmarna and Hedningarna in the United States. Now NorthSide's list includes Troka's first album, conveniently titled *Troka*. Three of the five members of the group have studied in the folk-music department of the Sibelius Academy, in Kaustinen, Finland; the others



Troka's eponymous release

have been students at the Krokola Conservatory, in Stockholm, and at the University of Jyväskylä, in Finland. Their training shows. They play richly complicated arrangements of catchy folk melodies, some eerie and some joyous, all propelled by a relentless beat maintained with almost no percussion. Instead of drums, Troka's rhythm section consists of a double bass and a harmonium, which create a warm, droning resonance that is both easy on the ears and an aid to digestion. The melodies are carried by various combinations of fiddle, viola, mandolin, and accordion, all played with invigorating dexterity. The songs have titles like "Aamu Seks-manninkankaala" ("A Morning in Sexman's Meadow"), but nobody's singing and there's nothing obscure about the music, which draws its influences from Finland, the Balkans, and Kentucky, among other places. Recorded in 1993, *Troka* deserves a wider audience for its historic meld of ancient substances with just enough contemporary recording technique that purists and impurists alike will find themselves cranking up the volume and dancing a jig around the living room. —C.M.Y.

## A DRUMMER FROM THE HEARTLAND

Notwithstanding its reputation as America's music, jazz rarely reflects all facets of the national experience.

Matt Wilson, one of the most singular drummers and bandleaders in the emerging jazz generation, comes from Knoxville, Illinois, and his music argues that midwestern prairie soil can be as fertile as New Orleans Delta loam. Wilson's 1996 debut disc as a band leader, *As Wave Follows Wave* (Palmetto), included "Sweet Betsy From Pike"

and a free-form setting of Carl Sandburg along with joyously eloquent improvisation. *Going Once, Going Twice*, his sequel, assembles a different band yet conveys the same heartland audacity. As a drummer, Wilson is keenly attuned to sonic weight. Equally willing to pump out backbeats and raise quieter clatters, he is well served by original compositions



In the lead, Matt Wilson

that embrace exotic scales, folk melodies, and roadhouse raves with matching fervor. As a bandleader, Wilson

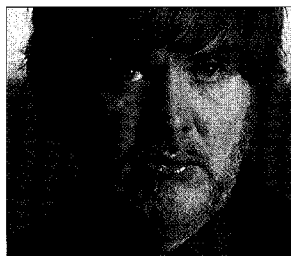
savors the competitive heat of a two-reed front line, and extracts a rainbow of colors plus expressionistic solos from Andrew D'Angelo (on alto sax and bass clarinet) and Joel Frahm (on soprano and tenor saxophones). *Going Once, Going Twice* does not avoid loose-limbed swing, especially on "Andrew's Ditty," yet has a wealth of moods to offer, from languid on a

cover of "Turn, Turn, Turn" to quietly free-form on the standard "Hey There" to colloquial on the title track, which is built around a banjo and an auctioneer. And "Schoolboy Thug," Wilson's maniacally gleeful nod to rock with arena-sized drumming and a punk-vocal refrain, may even have created a new genre—garage jazz. —B.B.

## BEBOP, BALLADS, AND EXOTIC RHYTHMS

Musicians have known about the expansive talents of Tom Harrell for more than twenty years. For much of that time the trumpeter has enhanced the music of Woody Herman, Horace Silver, Phil Woods, and countless others while creating few recordings under his own name. Harrell's time in the spotlight was long overdue, and his recent affiliation with RCA Victor finally shows the wider world an instrumental giant who composes and arranges as creatively as he plays. *The Art of Rhythm* summarizes the music that currently captures Harrell's fancy. Spanish, Brazilian, Caribbean, and Indian influences appear alongside bebop and balladry, in ten original compositions that Harrell has scored for an ever-shifting ensemble drawn from two dozen of his friends and peers. Although diverse percussionists are used extensively, the arrangements reveal more than a penchant for exotic

beats. The samba "Petals Danse" is indicative, featuring three string players and no drummers and recalling both Villa-Lobos and Jobim. Having so much talent to draw on, including the saxophonists Dewey Redman, David Sanchez, and Greg Tardy and the guitarists Romero Lubambo and Mike Stern, Harrell is generous with the improvisational spotlight. There is not a single track, in fact, on which he opens the soloing; but when his turn arrives, Harrell plays with the same mixture of curiosity, lyricism, and surprise that characterizes his writing. The overall effect is in the tradition of the Gil Evans-Miles Davis collaborations, realized here by one supremely gifted musician. —B.B.



Tom Harrell

all effect is in the tradition of the Gil Evans-Miles Davis collaborations, realized here by one supremely gifted musician. —B.B.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe.

Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, and other publications.



# Classical Music

BY AUSTIN BAER

## CAN IT BE? NEW WORLD BAROQUE

From the Eurocentric point of view, colonial culture smacks of the provincial: if not derivative (because remote from the source), it must be quaint (because cross-bred with naive local tradition). Today snobbish imperialist attitudes are under steady fire. Ours is a golden age of rediscovery in the arts, and few icons glitter more brightly than an unjustly neglected native genius. Two of the latest candidates are composers of "New Spain": the Italian-born Ignacio de Jer usalem (ca. 1710–1769), and Manuel de Zumaya (ca. 1678–1755), of mixed Native American and European descent. Though their names are not unknown to the authoritative *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980), few outside a narrow subspecialty had ever encountered them until the appearance of the CD *Mexican Baroque* (Das Alte Werk/Teldec), performed by San Fran-



Chanticleer

cisco's twelve-member all-male vocal ensemble Chanticleer. The reviewer for England's influential *Gramophone* magazine, for one, considered this a "very exciting disc indeed." How distinctive the composers' voices are—and how "Mexican"—remains a matter of debate. Jer usalem suggests Mozart in an elegantly churchly mood calculated to please. Zumaya is wild yet learned, delighting in spiky counterpoint. Having released *Mexican Baroque II* in February, Chanticleer now embarks on a concert tour to spread the long-forgotten masters' fame from California, Texas, and Colorado back home to Mexico, where cathedrals in Mexico City, Morelia, Oaxaca, and Guadalajara will resound to the indigenous baroque scores for the first time in centuries. (April 27–May 20; for the full tour schedule, look up Chanticleer at [www.atlanticrecords.com](http://www.atlanticrecords.com) or phone 800-950-1177.)

## AS THE SAYING GOES, "ALL IS IN ORDER"

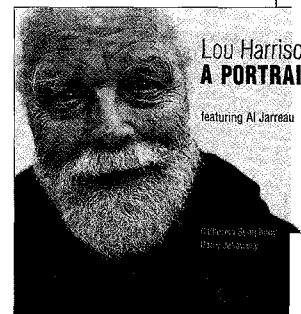
Recognized as a grand master of the violin for more than two decades, Anne-Sophie Mutter, now thirty-four, is of course an old hand at the Beethoven violin sonatas. This season, for the first time, she tackles all ten in chronological order. Along with the pianist Lambert Orkis, she traverses the set in three-concert series at Carnegie Hall (April 14, 22, 30; 212-247-7800), Chicago's Orchestra Hall (April 19, 26, 29; 312-294-3000), and San Francisco's Davies Hall (May 3 and 4; 415-864-6000). One-evening programs of selected Beethoven sonatas are offered in Dallas, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, and Los Angeles). The performances are part of an eleven-month world



tour exclusively devoted to this repertoire, recorded live by Deutsche Grammophon. Preparations for the marathon took Mutter to the archives in the house of Beethoven's birth, in Bonn. "The paper of the manuscripts is almost transparent in places—Beethoven corrected and scratched through so much," she said on a recent swing through New York after a vacation with her children in the Rockies. "Seeing the handwriting completes the picture you have from the printed scores. It shows the conflict in his character." Playing the ten violin sonatas as a group, she has discovered, throws new light on the material as well. "Beethoven needed contrast. I used to feel that No. 5, the 'Spring Sonata,' was too innocent, too harmless. It's not when you see it in the context of No. 4, which is so dark. It's like at Yellowstone: a cold day makes you long for sunshine."

## MADE TO LAST

There are more recondite things to say about the music of Lou Harrison (born 1917), but the simple truth is that it's lovely to listen to. His hallmark is melody—"the audience's take-home pay," he has called it. One floats down his scores as if rafting broad, balmy streams spangled with sunlight, ajangle with sensuous, not-quite-human song. Harrison's life and travels—someday to be told at length in an interminably delayed biography from the Oxford University Press—should make colorful reading. Getting by variously as a florist, a dancer, a critic, a veterinarian's assistant, a music copyist, a professor, and heaven knows what else, Harrison crossed paths with a motley crew of teachers, mentors, and colleagues, from the fanatically systematic Arnold Schoenberg to the chance-happy John Cage. Ethnic music (of the Americas, of the Far East) has always fascinated him. In search of new timbres, he has scoured inner-city junkyards and circled the globe. His Symphony No. 4 (subtitled "Last Symphony") makes

Lou Harrison  
A PORTRAIT

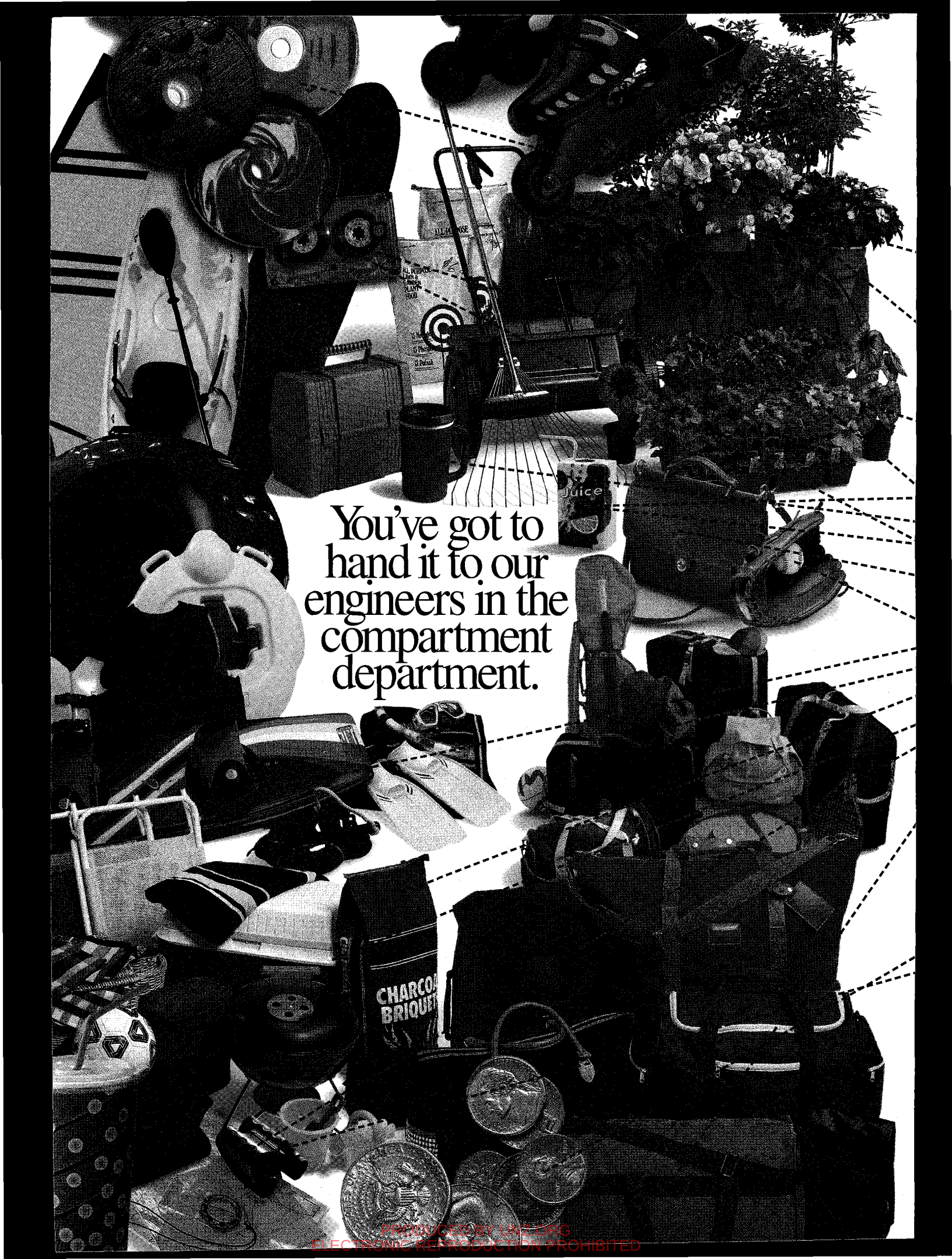
featuring Al Jarreau

Photo: Gary Ross  
Photo: M. S. G.

a radiant summation of a bewitching, utterly personal style that over the decades has kept remarkably true to itself. The piece runs forty-odd minutes, concluding with three Native American tales of the coyote, narrated in a disarming singsong. Since 1990 Harrison's Fourth has seen some fine-tuning, and this month the National Symphony Orchestra gives the East Coast premiere of the now definitive version at the Kennedy Center (April 23–25; 202-467-4600). Home listeners can hear it now on the superb CD *Lou Harrison: A Portrait* (Argo), featuring the California Symphony under its industrious founder and music director, Barry Jekowsky, who navigates Harrison's currents perfectly; in the coyote tales Al Jarreau is the hip, graceful vocalist. Happily, both are on hand in the capital.

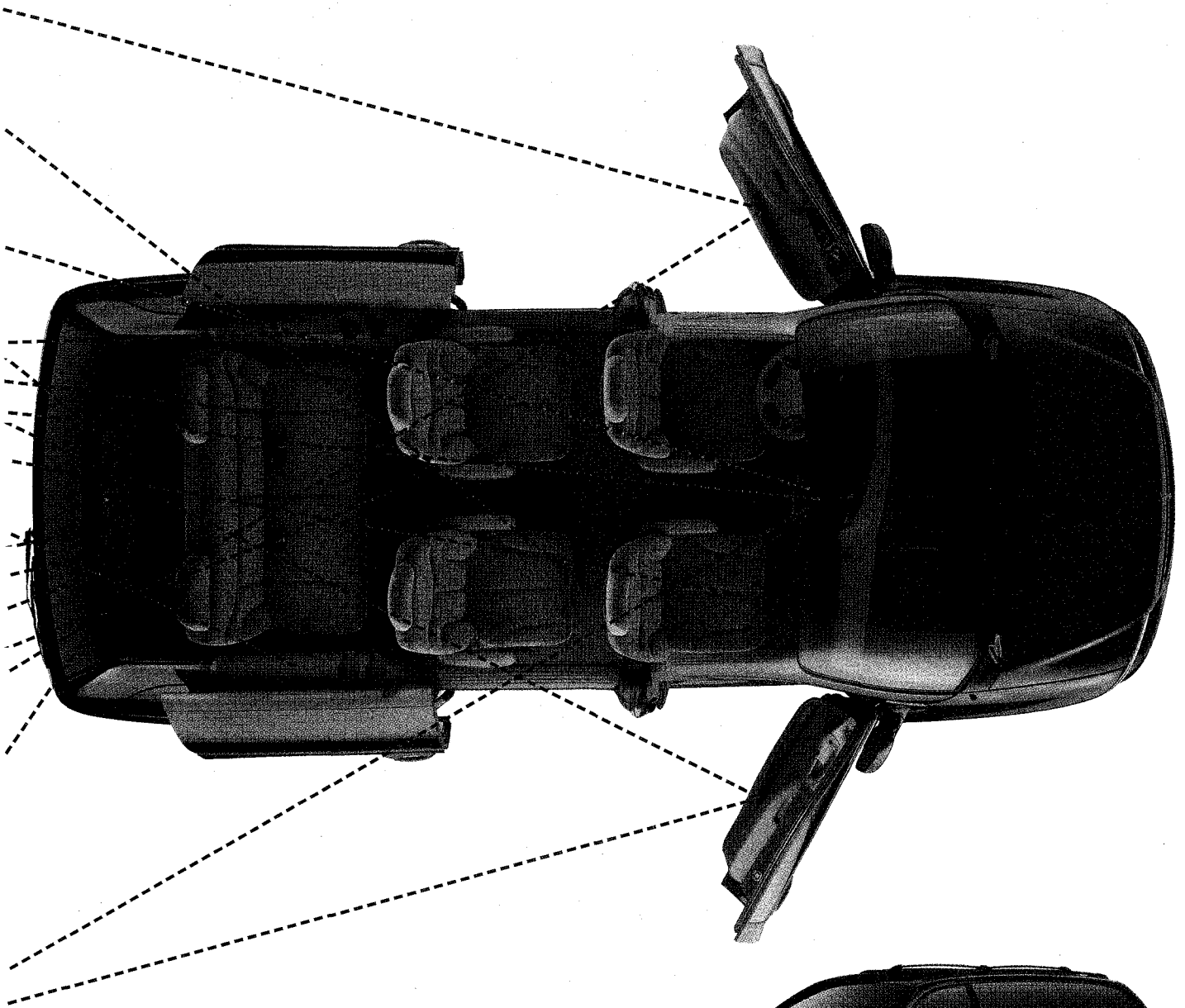
Austin Baer is a writer based in New York.





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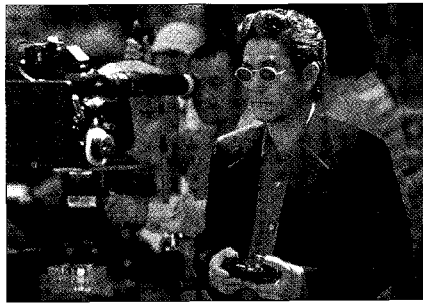


# Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR

## FLOWERS AND GUNFIRE

In Japanese cult director Takeshi Kitano's strange and beautiful new film, *Fireworks*, the director plays Yoshitaka Nishi, a taciturn former police detective who, when he's not calmly whacking the mobsters responsible for wounding his partner (Ren Osugi), cheerfully devotes himself to his terminally ill wife, Miyuki (Kayoko Kishimoto), in her last days. Winner of the Golden Lion Award at the 1997 Venice Film Festival, and the toast of the Toronto Film Festival, *Fireworks* is an oddly convincing blend of action thriller and quiet ode to the pleasures of mature marriage. Kitano's screenplay amounts to no more than a few pages; his characters' complexities are established through strategic shifts of pace, from immobility to frantic action, that compel the viewer's attention away from narrative to visual cues flagging the film's spare but intense emotionality. Staring into a florist's window, Nishi's paralyzed and depressed partner finds solace in flowers that he will later paint. (The paintings are the director's own.) We see Nishi flashing back on the gruesome shooting that fuels his own bloody actions, and then giggling with his wife as they take a final trip



The director and star Takeshi Kitano

to Mount Fuji. By turns goofy, brutal, and ecstatic, the director's eccentric style flouts the rules of conventional filmmaking to create a mood at once droll and wistful, its elegiac tone heightened by Joe Hisaishi's lovely acoustic score. Kitano's earlier gangster comedy, *Sonatine*, will also be released (under Quentin Tarantino's supervision) this spring, by Miramax's Rolling Thunder Films.

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.

Neil Jordan has taken his crack at big Hollywood pictures (*Interview With the Vampire*, *Michael Collins*), but the Irish director has done his finest work in small-scale films such as



Eamonn Owens (center) as Francie

*The Miracle and The Crying Game*. *The Butcher Boy* is his best film yet. Adapted in a wonderfully wicked screenplay by Jordan and Patrick McCabe from McCabe's novel, the movie is set in rural Ireland in the 1960s and tells the story of a young boy who, dogged by inconstancy and abandonment, retreats into a fantasy world of adventure fed by television and Cold War images. Left to

## SLAUGHTERHOUSE LIFE

his own devices by his manic-depressive mother (Aisling O'Sullivan) and his drunken ruin of a father (Stephen Rea), and hounded by the town busybody (a very funny Fiona Shaw), young Francie (played, in an astonishingly vibrant performance, by first-time actor Eamonn Owens) spirals into madness and rage in a cycle of explosive episodes that alienate even his faithful best friend. When the comfort he draws from a vision of an earthy Virgin Mary (a maliciously cast Sinead O'Connor) turns sour, Francie seals his fate with an act of breathtaking vindictiveness. For all its somber themes, there's nothing in the least mawkish about *The Butcher Boy*. Shot in quick, febrile takes, the movie builds with its cocksure tone and jaunty score to a pitch of menace laced with sadness, mimicking Francie's erratic inner state and his gift for self-destruction.

## A STRUGGLE WITH THE SECT

Nothing if not timely, Boaz Yakin's second film, *A Price Above Rubies*, takes on the conflict between religious and secular visions of living in modern America. Unlike Yakin's first feature, *Fresh*, a wonderfully nuanced study of a black boy trying to survive in a drug-infested inner city, *A Price Above Rubies* mauls its subject with an unhappy mixture of ignorance and disingenuousness. Though she's jarringly cast against type, Renee Zellweger (*Jerry Maguire*) acquits herself well as Sonia, a restless young Orthodox Jewish matron who gradually slips away from the New York Hasidic enclave that both shelters her from and stifles her daring spirit. Equally incongruously cast, British actor Christopher Eccleston (*Jude*) plays the unscrupulous brother-in-law who, in exploiting her head for business and her untapped sexual appetite, sets her free in ways he could never have envisioned. Troubled by protests from New York Hasidim during the location shoot, the movie will undoubtedly—and understandably—draw fire from the Jewish community upon its release. In the service of a bland, pandering message about freedom and multicultural tolerance, Yakin barely attempts to comprehend this hermetic sect on its own terms. With the exception of a throw-

away final scene in which Sonia's pious husband acknowledges the legitimacy of worlds beyond his own, the religious characters range from rigidly unforgiving to cravenly hypocritical, while Yakin corrals all our sympathy for the black sheep and her rescuers.



Renee Zellweger

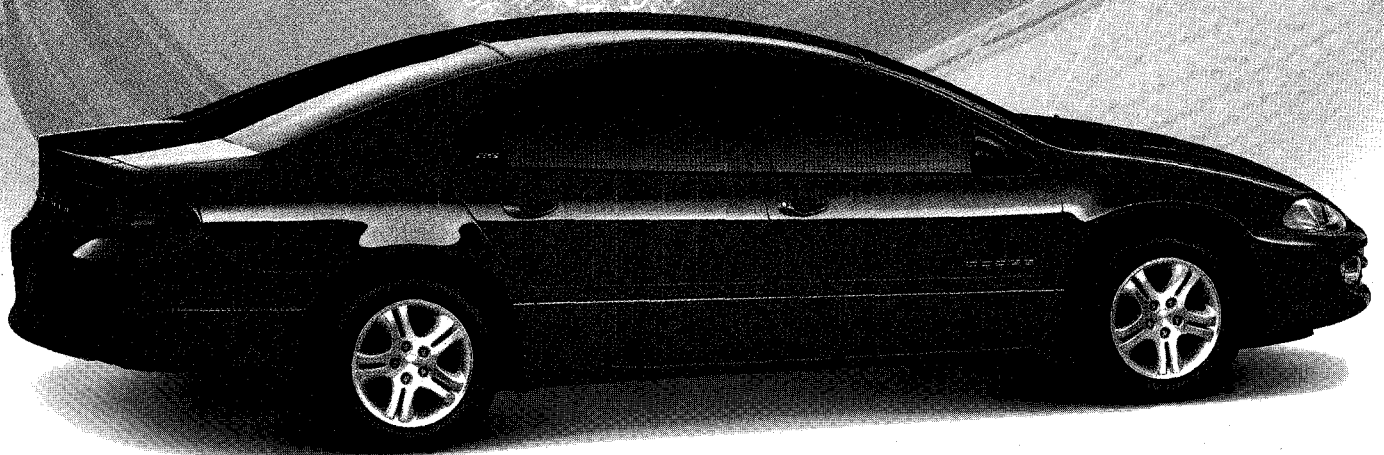


## The New Dodge

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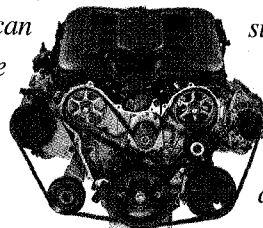
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(Continued from page 26)

fashionable in secondary schools. A recent, widely cited study commissioned by the American Association of University Women (prepared by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women) decries the current system. Titled "How Schools Shortchange Girls," the AAUW report declares that "the educational system is not meeting girls' needs." The executive summary cites "gender bias as a major problem at all levels of schooling," asserting that girls are plagued by sexual harassment, even at the grade school level, and neglected by sexist teachers, who pay more attention to boys. As a consequence, it seems, girls fall behind their male classmates: "Girls and boys enter school roughly equal in measured ability. Twelve years later, girls have fallen behind their male classmates in key areas such as higher-level mathematics and measures of self-esteem."

These remarks might awaken the anxieties of many parents with daughters in coed schools. But the dire tone of the summary is belied by the underlying findings of the AAUW study. Reviewed in its entirety, it presents a more complex, nuanced view of the female educational experience, which varies with race and class. In fact, "socio-economic status," not sex, is said to be "the best predictor of both grades and test scores."

**A**RE schools "shortchanging girls"? Reading the entire AAUW report, it's hard to say. "There is considerable evidence that girls earn higher grades than boys throughout their school careers," the report acknowledges. And the sexes seem to be approaching parity in skills. Recent research indicates that "sex differences in verbal abilities have decreased markedly. . . . [and] differences in mathematics achievement are small and declining." Findings regarding achievement in science, however, are discouraging: girls are not catching up to boys and may even be falling further behind. Both sexes tend to lose interest in math and science as they proceed through school, but the loss is more pronounced for girls. Girls also exhibit less confidence in their mathematical abilities than boys, although it's worth remembering that girls are generally socialized to be relatively self-effacing; boys are expected to brag.

These differences in social condition-

ing complicate the task of measuring girls' relative self-esteem. The AAUW study suggests that high school girls have less self-esteem than boys and that the self-esteem of girls declines dramatically after puberty. How did researchers measure self-esteem? They counted the number of elementary school and high school students who reported being "happy the way I am." Sixty-nine percent of elementary school boys and 60 percent of elementary school girls declared that they were indeed happy with themselves. But among high school students 46 percent of boys were "happy the way I am," and a mere 29 percent of girls.

It's impossible to know what this survey means. Maybe it is evidence that girls have low self-esteem, as the AAUW report suggests. Or maybe it demonstrates that girls are less complacent and more ambitious than boys, and more likely to hold themselves to high standards of performance. Maybe boys are in a rut. Maybe not. By itself, Are you happy with yourself? is a useless survey question, because interpretations of the answer are hopelessly subjective.

What additional evidence is there to support the common assumption that girls are more likely to suffer a drop in self-esteem as they enter their teens? The AAUW report cites recent work, by Carol Gilligan, Lyn Mikel Brown, and Annie Rogers, documenting "the silencing of girls" in junior high and high school. But even if their findings on a loss of confidence in girls are accurate, these tell us very little about sexism or sex difference, because they offer no comparable study of boys. Maybe a loss of self-esteem is a function of adolescence, not of sex. Maybe boys are silenced too, metaphorically if not in fact. Maybe they make noise to drown out their fears. Maybe not.

**A** REVIEW of the usual studies of female development and education is most likely to result in uncertainty. The overall effects of coeducation are open to question, but evidence that single-sex secondary schools are especially beneficial for girls is scarce. One of the leading researchers in this area, Valerie Lee, a professor of education at the University of Michigan, found that students in Catholic girls' schools enjoyed advantages over female students in Catholic coeducational schools. Her subsequent

study of independent schools, however, "produced equivocal results." She found "no consistent pattern of results favoring either single sex or coeducational schools, either for girls or boys."

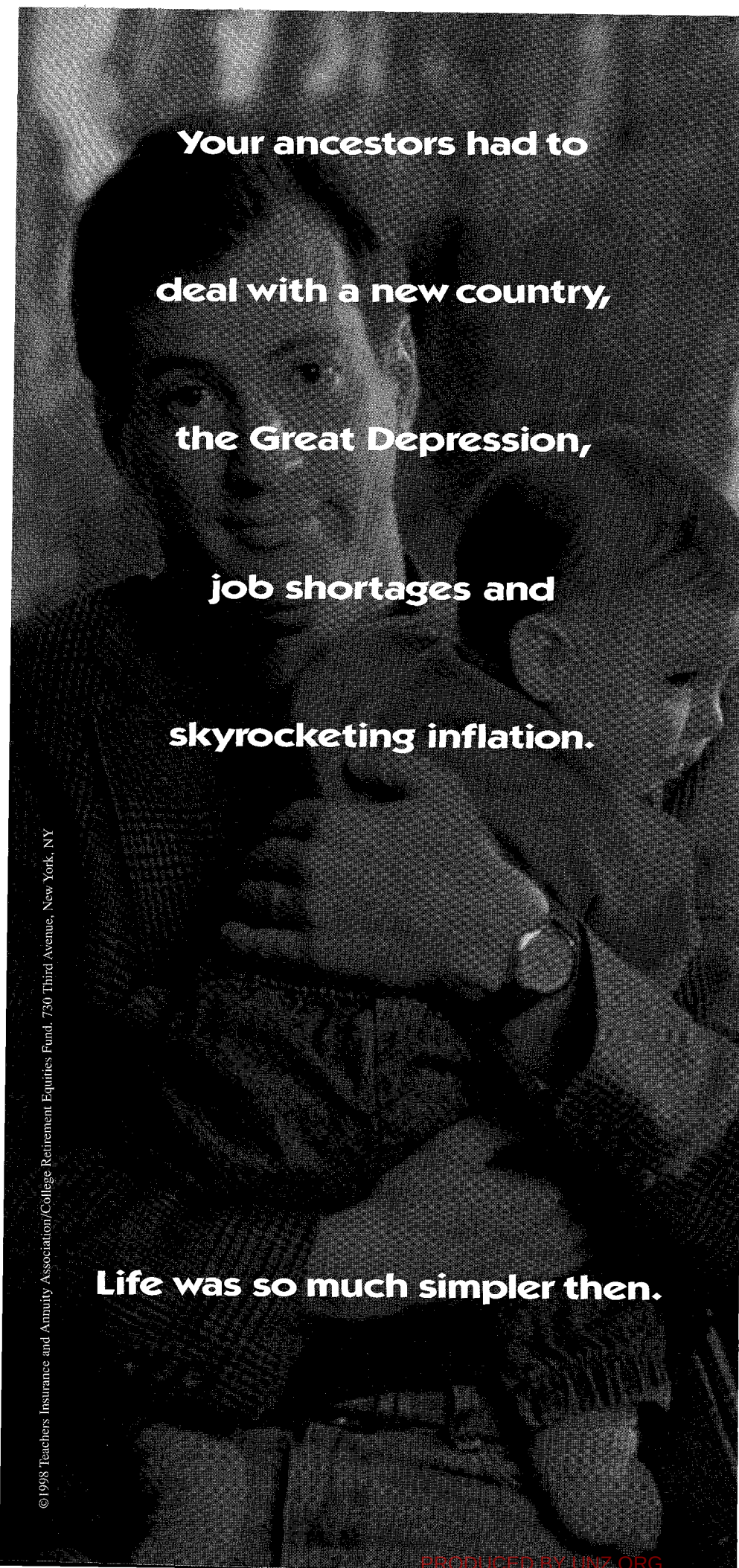
Lee's work also challenged the assumption that girls' schools are considerably less sexist than coed schools. Her findings suggest that they may simply exhibit different styles of sexism. Comparing a sample of coeducational, all-boys, and all-girls independent schools,

*Socio-economic status,  
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of both grades and  
test scores."*

Lee found that "the frequency of [sexist] incidents was similar in the three types of schools, [but] the forms of sexism were different." Sexism was most severe in boys' schools; in coed schools it was most blatant and frequent in chemistry classes; girls' schools did pay the most attention to equality between the sexes, but they also "perpetuated a pernicious form of sexism: academic dependence and nonrigorous instruction." In all-girls chemistry classes, for example, "undue attention was paid to neatness and cleanliness as well as to drawing parallels between domesticity and chemistry activities." It's not surprising to learn, after reviewing this study, that at The Young Women's Leadership School many walls are painted pink.

The sexism in girls' and women's schools is insidious. Whether manifested in feminine decor or in an approach to teaching that assumes a female penchant for cooperative, or "connected," learning, stereotypical notions of femininity often infect institutions for women and girls. Many of them encourage female academic achievement, but they discourage academic competition with males. They encourage heterosexual women and girls to separate their social and intellectual lives, reinforcing the dissonance bred into many achievement-oriented females.





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That, at least, is what I learned about single-sex education as a student at Smith College, where I realized that the restraints of femininity are often self-imposed. In 1971, during my senior year, the college conducted a survey on coeducation, which a majority of students opposed. Many reported that they preferred not competing with men intellectually. As conversations made clear, they were concerned not about discrimination but about appearing unfeminine. Many students stressed that they liked being at a women's school because they didn't have to worry about their appearance in class.

Social convention can be blamed for their inclination to dress and act differently around men, I suppose. But adhering to convention is as much a choice as is challenging it. Single-sex education allowed female students to exercise the choice of being smart on weekdays and pretty on weekends. The prospect of being intellectually assertive and sexually appealing simultaneously, every day of the week, was barely considered or, perhaps, even desired.

To me, student opposition to coeducation at Smith underscored the need for it. The survey of student attitudes crystallized the danger that a single-sex school would pander to women's fears of masculinizing themselves. It was at least

romantic, not collegial—and collegiality is crucial to social equality. Laws against sexual harassment may not be nearly as effective in preventing it as the daily experiences of men working with competent, intelligent female colleagues.

This is not to suggest that many women don't benefit from attending single-sex schools; other graduates of women's colleges will offer testimony very different from my own. But it is important to acknowledge what sexual separatism can cost.

Since their inception in the nineteenth century, all-girls schools have fostered femininity along with feminism. They are models of equivocation, reinforcing regressive notions of sex difference at the same time that they educate women and help to facilitate their entry into the professions. In the beginning these contradictions were unavoidable: coeducation was not an option, and female chauvinism was essential to building the women's movement. Today the case for single-sex education is much less clear. The Young Women's Leadership School is intended to prepare girls for college and careers, and is apt to succeed, given that it is a new, well-equipped, well-funded school that currently serves about 150 students; it is also a school with something to prove. But there is little if any evidence that a small coed school of equal quality would not succeed as well.

It's tempting to conclude with a recognition that some students prosper in single-sex schools and some benefit more from coeducation. Why not allow for the establishment of sexually segregated public schools in order to provide educational choice? That's a little like asking why the Supreme Court denied people the choice of racially segregated schools, which many parents and students preferred. The Constitution and various civil-rights statutes prohibit the state from choosing to discriminate on the basis of race or sex. (In some cases the law prohibits acts of private discrimination as well.) Federal law does provide narrow exceptions for the maintenance of historically female and black colleges and single-sex secondary schools. But as the federal district court in *Garrett v. Board of Education* pointed out, "No case has ever upheld the existence of a sex-segregated public school that has the effect of favoring one sex over another."

Why should boys in East Harlem be deprived of the opportunity to enroll in what *The New York Times* described as a "haven" from "bad schools, tough streets, and bleak prospects"? It's hard to make a case for the establishment of The Young Women's Leadership School as a form of affirmative action when poor girls from minority communities are no more at risk than poor boys. It was equally hard for the Board of Education in Detroit to justify establishing schools for African-American boys when girls were at risk too. Affirmative action is supposed to compensate members of historically disadvantaged groups for the unfair advantages enjoyed by others. The version of affirmative action offered by supporters of The Young Women's Leadership School promises to pit one disadvantaged group against another.

Should we resolve the competition by establishing a comparable public school for boys in East Harlem? Only if we're willing to abandon efforts to ensure that coed schools are free of gender bias. And only if there is compelling evidence that girls and boys are most likely to prosper in segregated schools. So far, proponents of single-sex education have primarily relied on conventional assumptions about male and female skills, learning styles, and sensibilities (which dominated the defense in the VMI case)—along with unsubstantiated assertions about the evils of sexual integration. That is not enough to justify the revision of civil-rights laws against sex discrimination.

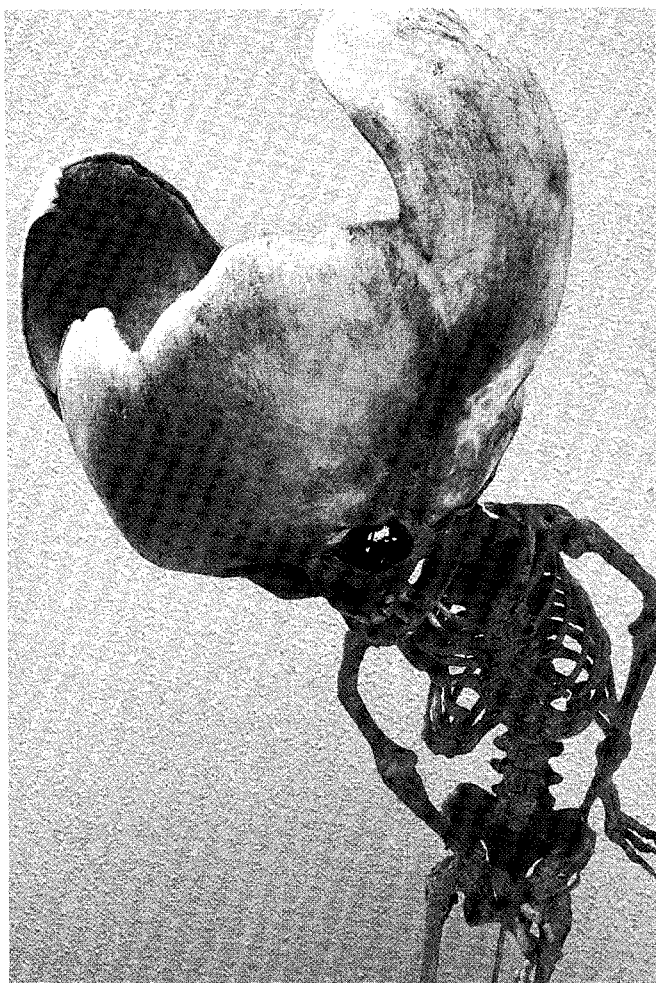
Forty years ago the Supreme Court struck down racial segregation, relying in part on empirical evidence that racially separate schools were inherently unequal. We ought not to embrace a standard of separate but equal schools for males and females without equivalent empirical evidence that they are needed and likely to make progress toward equality. A hundred and fifty years ago the drive to establish separate but equal schools for men and women was necessitated by the separation of the sexes in social and political life. A hundred and fifty years ago, when women were excluded from men's academies, women's academies did indeed represent affirmative action. Today a return to separate single-sex schools may hasten the revival of separate gender roles. Only as the sexes have become less separate have women become more free. ♀

*Since their inception,  
all-girls schools  
have fostered  
femininity along  
with feminism.*

arguable that women's colleges were accepting the limits of femininity rather than challenging them.

Social mores on campus reflected this embrace of traditional gender roles, since males and females existed for each other as dates, objects of desire, not classmates. In protecting young women from the attractions and distractions of men, single-sex schools can unwittingly contribute to their sexual objectification. There interactions between the sexes are primarily





*The skeleton of a hydrocephalic child, its skull pushed open and outward by fluid*

## An Eye for Anomaly

*A photographer finds  
her subjects among things that are  
“not quite right”*

**M**ANY people plant flower bulbs in the fall. Rosamond Purcell once planted a copy of *Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison. The efflorescence, harvested the following

**by Marshall Jon Fisher**

spring, sits in a glass case in her Somerville, Massachusetts, studio. The pages are yellowed and browned, as though burned; some of the paper was eaten away by worms, and more of it was simply bleached by mois-

ture and acids in the soil. Sentence fragments appear through holes or between whiteouts: “Unlike any novel,” “choke myself,” and, alone in the center of one page, “Negro.”

Purcell is an internationally renowned photographer of natural-history specimens. The rotted book, along with the other objects she has amassed in her studio, reflects her fascination with “things that are transitional—between

natural and artificial,” as she puts it, and with decomposition’s way of forming strange and symbolic juxtapositions. The head of what was probably a child’s rubber hobbyhorse, rescued from her favorite Maine junkyard, seems to be shedding a paint-chip tear. A piece of cement lobster-trap ballast bears the remnants of Sunday comics that were only partly successful in protecting it from barnacles: “I can feel a tremendous pressure building up in my brain!” Dagwood cries.

Dilapidated books—those halfway back to whence they came—are Purcell’s favorite possessions. She has several full bookcases that look like they were painted there by Edvard Munch; the books have serpentine pastel spines, from which most of the titles have long been effaced. Here and there around the studio are small exhibits consisting of two or three books welded together by the elements, bleached out of recognition, and twisted and dried into what looks and feels like driftwood. Books are also the foundations of some of Purcell’s “constructions”—objects strategically arranged in small wooden cases, in the tradition of the artist Joseph Cornell. Whereas Cornell’s constructions were romantic, though, often incorporating photos of movie stars or other pop icons, Purcell’s tend to be concerned with the natural world. In one, for instance, glass and a bit of cloth create a bird’s-eye view of crashing into a window.

Then there are the stacks of paper that Purcell sent to a biology-professor friend, who treated his laboratory termites to a feeding orgy before returning the stacks. “Look at the islands they formed in the paper,” she says, as if admiring the work of a favorite artist. “I like the way they just left the edges, like kids who won’t eat the crusts of their sandwiches.”

Purcell, fifty-five and the mother of two grown sons, looks like the last person who would collect rodent remains (she has a rat skeleton from India and a mouse skeleton from Central Park) and termite leftovers, or produce the photographs for which she is best known. Collected in two books (her third and fourth) with text by



the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, the photos feature specimens from museums of natural history around the world. Many are, simply, beautiful: Central American quetzal feathers arranged in a rainbow collage, ibis eggs covered in swirls of museum dust, a whale's jawbone that reminded Gould of the view of Arizona from an airplane. But others—for example, parts of human babies preserved in jars—will make some viewers recoil. These reflect Purcell's inclination toward the unusual, the disturbing, the incomplete. "When given a choice between six straight objects and a crooked one," she says, "or between six complete ones and one that's missing something, I will definitely want the one that's not quite right."

This predilection has been the driving force behind the collection in her studio: a congregation of survivors from a century of mass production and disposal. Shelves covering one wall of her studio hold a graveyard of dolls' heads and houses; birds' nests; figurine refugees from athletic trophies, toy armies, and wedding cakes; and so on. One corner sports a sort of plate-armor wallpaper made of painted and rusted scrap metal. Purcell occasionally uses the metal as background for a photo, but the real reason for collecting it is its "lovely patina and color and suggestibility," she says. "It's just extremely restful and compelling."

Purcell calls her mania for collecting "a semitragic inherited problem that kicks in in our late twenties." Her father, the eminent Harvard historian Robert Lee Wolff, numbered among his accomplishments an assemblage of English Victorian literature worthy of a five-volume catalogue. Her grandparents collected olive-oil soap and Chinese porcelain. Her own acquisitive urge germinated in 1979, around the time she discovered an old economics book, written in French, in Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. Its insides had been largely eaten away by worms. "That was the first object," she says, "that I really wanted to own." She placed butterflies among the paper shards, which bore fragments of text; the pages, with their middles eaten away, looked like a stack of picture

frames around a surrealist painting. After photographing the book she gave it back, but she soon began accumulating specimens of that ilk—"objects that are no longer useful, but that still have the signature of what they were," as she puts it.

Two years later, while teaching at

For the photographs Purcell traveled from Harvard's collection to the Nationaal Natuurhistorische Museum in Leiden, the Netherlands, to St. Petersburg's Museum of Zoology, and elsewhere, turning "the victims and victors of anomalous conditions"—giants and dwarfs, con-



*Male and female Paradisea butterflies, caught in New Guinea by a collector who in turn was captured and, reportedly, eaten by Papuans*

the Maine Photographic Workshop, in Rockport, Purcell discovered the junkyard that became her Mycenae. Several times a year she makes the four-hour trek north to prospect for inspiration. "I don't know if it's the junkyard of junkyards," she says, "but it's mine—the only one I've haunted. It's like my own museum and art-supply store in one."

Purcell's interest in damaged goods, however, extends to a realm not represented in any junkyard. In the afterword to her first book with Gould, *Illuminations* (1986), she hinted at "an immense mythical world . . . of anomalies and monsters, both of which hovered at the brink, but not in the midst, of this volume." The fulfillment of this flirtation came earlier this year, with the publication of *Special Cases: Natural Anomalies and Historical Monsters*, a literary and photographic meditation on human abnormalities both real and imagined. The text—Purcell's first book-length published writing—is reminiscent of Leslie Fiedler's *Freaks* (1978), but it trades the critic and social commentator's voice for that of the artist.

joined twins and people with half a body, albinos and piebalds—into art. The cover photograph is a perfect example of Purcell's talent. In it the skeleton of a hydrocephalic child is not repellent; rather, it appears as animated as a Disney character, the skull inflating into the foreground, opening on top like a tulip in bloom.

PURCELL has never enjoyed horror shows or felt at ease among the monstrous. Like many of us, she was disturbed as a child by the sight of the maimed or the disabled. "I've always been one of those people who aren't very cool around deformities," she told me during a recent visit to her studio. "I was nervous around things that were not quite as expected—they were a source of worry." For example, she was afraid to ride her tricycle because the boy next door, who would always come out to ride with her, was missing fingers on one hand.

What, then, is Purcell doing photographing pit vipers with prey in their mouths, babies' disembodied arms in jars, and syphilitics' tongues? The an-



swer leads back to a spring day in 1979, when she showed up at the Museum of Comparative Zoology to photograph dead animals.

That story in turn begins some ten years earlier, when Purcell's husband-to-be, Dennis Purcell (the son of Harvard's Nobel laureate astrophysicist Edward Purcell, a former assistant to Ansel Adams, a photographer and artist in his own right, and also a computer engineer), gave her a Polaroid camera. The twenty-seven-year-old Rosamond Wolff had been teaching French and writing fiction, but almost immediately she found her artistic medium in photography, a discipline she had never given much respect. "I thought that photographers were shortsighted and didn't have an understanding of how complicated the world was," she says. "I didn't think that taking pictures would be very gratifying, but it turned out that for twenty years it was all I wanted to do."

Purcell began by taking photos of friends and relatives, as anyone might, but she quickly reached a level of expertise. Her black-and-white Polaroids, which she wrapped in diapers for protection and showed to the prominent photographer Minor White, were startlingly good. Light captures a woman and a birdbath in a fragmented mirror, carves unexpected shapes out of silverware, scissors, and human bodies, reflects off windows to superimpose incongruous images. In 1973 White exhibited her photos at MIT, where he taught photography, and then Purcell took them to the publisher David Godine, a friend of hers, who brought out her first book, *A Matter of Time*, in 1975.

By 1979, tired of "shoving models around," she was in need of new inspiration. Having grown up in Harvard's environs, she was well aware of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and she decided to confront her fear of its contents. "I went to the museum because I didn't like museums," she says. "I was afraid, and I don't like being afraid of things. I had an aversion to the things in those collections—I still do. But when I actually looked at the animals in the museum, they had qualities I didn't expect to find, abstract and aesthetic qualities that had nothing to do with my apprehension. And my instincts about what to photograph were all that mattered; it didn't matter whether I *liked* what I photographed."

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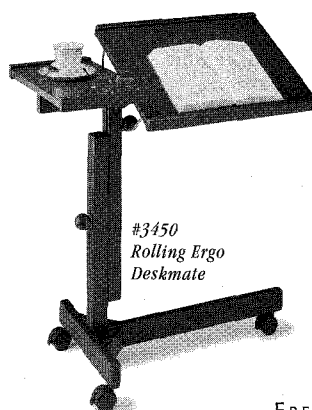
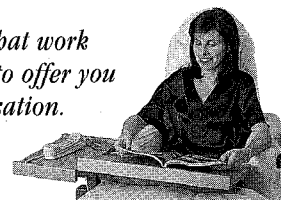
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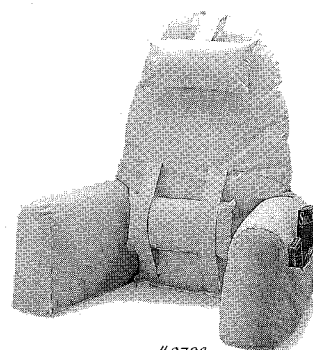
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the partly digested economics volume, appeared in her second book, *Half-Life* (1980), and were later featured in her two collaborations with Gould and in their regular column in *The Sciences* magazine. Emboldened by her victory over the museum's shadowy figures, Purcell turned to a source of even greater anxiety: ill-formed human beings (the study of which is called teratology). In 1992, when Purcell was eight weeks into her tenure as a visiting artist at the Getty Institute, in Santa Monica, California, a director there noticed that she was spending all her time searching for teratological specimens in the photographic library. He invited her to give a talk about them, and then, in 1993, after Purcell had traveled to Europe to photograph monsters real (in museums) and imagined (on church walls), he suggested that she curate an exhibit on the topic. "Special Cases" the exhibit led in turn to *Special Cases* the book.

Beginning with the first-century Roman museum of Pompey the Great, which boasted "the statue of a woman who had given birth to an elephant, a boy with the head of a dog, and a still-born child from a male homosexual," *Special Cases* traces our fascination with and dread of human abnormality. It turns from spectacles of dubious authenticity to actual human beings, probing "the inescapable relationship between a dreamed-up monster and its painfully viable counterpart." Anomalous children, Purcell explains in the book,

have been buried unbaptized at birth; baptized and then buried, thrown into the sea, or allowed to live if they "had all human parts," no matter how many or few. They've been shown for profit to gawking crowds or hidden from public view; when grown, they've been used as scapegoats in the marketplace, tortured to console the torturer, honored at court as rare and singular phenomena, and employed, paradoxically, as counselors to powerful emperors. . . . For sheer strangeness, public reaction may exceed the biological realities themselves.

Purcell is certainly not the first to examine the place of anomalous conditions in the human psyche. Giants populate the Bible and Greek literature; *Gulliver's Travels* explores the experiences of both

gigantism and dwarfism; and many twentieth-century writers, including Vladimir Nabokov and John Barth, have used conjoined twins (commonly called "Siamese twins" after the most celebrated pair, the nineteenth-century Chang and Eng) as fictional characters. In *Freaks*, Leslie Fiedler recalled his nervous excitement at the spiel of the sideshow "talker."

*Jo-Jo, the Dog-faced boy, the greatest an-thro-po-log-i-cal mon-ster-os-i-ty in captivity. Brought back at great expense from the jungles of Bary-zil. . . .*

*I feel my spine tingle and my heart leap as I relive the wonder of seeing for the first time my own most private nightmares on public display out there.*

It is our fear of these private nightmares, Purcell writes, that causes us to demonize the abnormal. As she has in the past with such items as the 2,000-year-old feet of a Danish "bog person" and the mouth and nose (and I mean only the mouth and nose) of a long-dead Spaniard, in her new book she confronts and transforms the duality of self and monstrous other. Through her lens the



*Tree branch as Rorschach?*

skeletons of Bolognese conjoined twins, with a rare vestigial third leg, appear as though in an intimate dance. The skeleton of a nineteenth-century seven-foot, six-inch giant has an elegance that its owner probably never enjoyed in life.

With this subject matter Purcell seems to have tapped into the zeitgeist. A popular Broadway show last season was *Side*

*Show*, a musical based on the life of the Hilton sisters—conjoined twins who captured some fleeting fame in the 1920s and 1930s. A bearded lady, Jennifer Miller, who embraces her condition and performs not as a freak but as a feminist educator and entertainer, was profiled last fall in *The New York Times*. A hundred years ago performers from the Barnum and Bailey Circus, led by their own Bearded Lady, Miss Annie Jones, held a meeting in London to call for a less "opprobrious" classification than "freaks." The euphemism they agreed on, "prodigies," seems about a century ahead of its time. Only now are the human anomalous receiving the respect that other persecuted groups have found in recent decades.

"A FRIEND just gave me the most wonderful thing," Purcell said to me toward the end of our visit. "He said he'd been thinking of me all week, ever since he found a mummified cat under his barn. I have it right back here. But you probably don't want to see it." Then, with glee, she added, "Oh, you do?"

She went to the refrigerator in the studio's small kitchen and opened the freezer. "It's in here with two pigeons and a squirrel." I thought of the sandwich she had been eating when I arrived. Had it come out of that fridge? She brought out a package swaddled in bubble wrap (the diaper days are over), and we knelt on either side of it on the floor. The cat was a big one, but his carcass weighed only a pound or so. His skin, like desiccated leather, formed hard, tight wrinkles on his belly; his ears were like petrified petals. His empty eye sockets were expressionless, but the cat's posture was one of repose. "I think he died peacefully, don't you?" Purcell asked.

The cat will no doubt someday find his way into Cibachrome, perhaps nestled up to a rodent-ravaged history book or outlined against a rusted hunk of fifty-year-old Maine metal. Like the hydrocephalic child and the Bolognese twins, this creature will live another life, more enduring than its natural one and in peace, at last, forever.

Purcell wrapped the cat up again and returned him to the freezer. "Would you like a cookie?" she asked. "But first we'd better wash our hands. This is definitely a studio where you wash your hands." ☼



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## Three New Revelations About LBJ

*The author of an about-to-be-published biography of Lyndon Johnson shares some of what he has learned*

**U**RINATING in a sink, inviting people into his bathroom, showing off his abdominal scar, exposing his private parts: after a while nothing surprises a biographer of Lyndon Baines Johnson. After fourteen years of research for a two-volume biography, of which the second volume, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press, I have, however, found some new evidence, in three areas, that even by Johnson standards is surprising.

First, I discovered that even as he decided to escalate the war, Johnson had deeper and more clairvoyant doubts

about Vietnam than contemporaries could possibly have imagined. He believed his own rhetoric about the need to fight in Vietnam. At the same time, however, he could see the makings of the quagmire ahead.

When, in May of 1964, Senator Richard Russell told Johnson that Vietnam was “the damn worst mess I ever saw,” LBJ replied, “That’s the way I’ve been feelin’ for six months.” Shortly after, he told McGeorge Bundy, his national-security adviser, “The more I stayed awake last night thinking of this thing, the more . . . it looks to me like we’re gettin’ into another Korea. . . . I don’t think it’s worth fightin’ for and I

don’t think we can get out. It’s just the biggest damned mess. . . . What the hell is Vietnam worth to me? . . . What is it worth to this country?”

After increasing U.S. combat troops in Vietnam in July of 1965, Johnson expressed doubts that he had done the right thing. “Light at the end of the tunnel?” he told his press secretary, Bill Moyers. “We don’t even have a tunnel; we don’t even know where the tunnel is.”

Lady Bird Johnson remembers the President’s pain over the war. “He had no stomach for it,” she told me, “no heart for it; it wasn’t the war he wanted. The one he wanted was on poverty and ignorance and disease, and that was worth putting your life into.” She added, “It was just a hell of a thorn stuck in his throat. It wouldn’t come up; it wouldn’t go down. . . . It was just pure hell and did not have that reassuring, strong feeling that this is right, that he had when he was in a crunch with civil rights or poverty or education. It didn’t have that ‘We’ll make it through this one; win or lose, it’s the right thing to do.’ So, uncertainty . . . we had a rich dose of that. . . . True, you can ‘bear any burden, pay any price’ if you’re sure you’re doin’ right. But if you do not know what is right . . .” Her voice trailed off. The opposition provoked in the United States by the expanding war spoke to Johnson’s hesitation and forebodings, but criticism made him more rather than less reluctant to consult his own doubts.

Johnson had “an unfillable hole in his ego,” Moyers says. Feelings of emptiness spurred him to eat, drink, and smoke to excess. Sexual conquests also helped to fill the void. He was a competitive womanizer. When people mentioned Kennedy’s many affairs, Johnson would bang the table and declare that he had more women by accident than Kennedy ever had on purpose.

Acknowledging the failure of a policy that by 1969 had cost 30,000 American lives was more than someone with so fragile an ego could manage.

Second, escalation of the war against his own misgivings made Johnson irrational almost to the point of disability. He told Richard Goodwin, a White House aide, that opponents of the war were close to being traitors. He told his staff that “the



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communists already control the three major networks and the forty major outlets of communication." He complained to Moyers that "the communist way of thinking" had infected everyone around him.

Moyers described Johnson to me as "paranoid" and "depressed," and never more so than in 1965. Moyers attributes this dark passage to "the realization about which he was clearer than anyone—that [Vietnam] was a road from which there was no turning back." Johnson saw the decision to send troops as potentially marking the end of his presidency. "It was a pronounced, prolonged depression," Moyers adds. "He would just go within himself, just disappear—morose, self-pitying, angry. . . . He was a tormented man," who described himself to Moyers as being in a Louisiana swamp that was "pulling me down." "When he said it," Moyers remembers, "he was lying in bed with the covers almost above his head."

I asked Moyers if others in the White House were as troubled by Johnson's behavior as he and Goodwin. Yes, Moyers replied, and "when they were deeply concerned about his behavior, they would call me—Cabinet officers and others. Rusk would call me and tell me about some exchange he just had with the President that was very disturbing, and he would say that he seemed to be very depressed."

I asked Moyers if Johnson was so continually depressed as to be incapable of rational judgments on Vietnam. No, he answered. Johnson was erratic. One day he would be down and the next he would be upbeat. "But always when he returned to the subject of Vietnam, this cloud in his eyes and this predictably unpredictable behavior" would recur.

Third, Johnson's role in the 1968 presidential campaign was more central to its outcome than previously known, or even suspected. In August, after Robert F. Kennedy had been assassinated and Hubert Humphrey, the likely Democratic nominee, hinted that he would make a quick end to the war, Johnson tried to come back into the presidential race and arrange a draft for himself at the Chicago convention. He asked John Connally to discuss his nomination with southern governors. A negative response from the governors, combined with the riot at the convention between anti-war demonstrators and Mayor Richard J. Daley's police

force, ended such thoughts. Resigned to Humphrey's candidacy, Johnson pressed his Vice President throughout the campaign not to stray too far from the Administration's position on Vietnam.

Humphrey largely complied. But at the end of September, when he showed greater flexibility than the White House on how to end the war, Johnson reacted angrily. He told Clark Clifford that he doubted Humphrey's ability to be President. He lacked the guts for the job. After Humphrey had become Vice President and expressed doubts about the war, the White House, according to a Humphrey aide, Ted Van Dyk, had arranged for wiretaps on Humphrey's office phones. Van Dyk learned this from two Secret Service agents on the vice-presidential detail. Neither Van Dyk nor Humphrey was surprised. Though Johnson in principle disliked taping and wiretaps, he secretly taped more than 7,500 of his own telephone conversations as President. Moreover, during the 1964 campaign, after a visit to the White House, Richard Russell wrote, "Hoover has apparently been turned loose and is tapping everything. . . . [Johnson] stated it took him hours each night to read them all (but he loves this)." The speed with which Johnson had information about Humphrey's presidential campaign suggested to Van Dyk that the White House was still tapping Humphrey's phones in 1968. Johnson apparently wanted the taps to gain advance notice and a chance to dissuade him should Humphrey decide to break away on the war.

With Richard Nixon sending word to Johnson, through Billy Graham, that as President he would give Johnson "a major share of credit" for a settlement in Vietnam and would "do everything to make you . . . a place in history," Johnson secretly favored Nixon in the campaign. "You know that Nixon is following my policies more closely than Humphrey," LBJ told his longtime friend Jim Rowe, a prominent Washington attorney, in October. When Humphrey persuaded Johnson to have a fence-mending talk at the White House and then showed up late from a campaign rally, Johnson refused to see him. Humphrey was furious. He told Van Dyk, "That bastard Johnson. . . . I saw him sitting in his office. Jim Jones [a member of the White House staff] was standing across the doorway, and I said to him: 'You tell the President he can cram it

up his ass.' I know Johnson heard me."

At this charged moment in the campaign Elias P. Demetracopoulos, a Greek journalist who had fled Athens in 1967 after the colonels' coup, provided the President with a chance to damage, if not sink, Nixon's campaign. Demetracopoulos had learned that Greece's military dictators had funneled more than half a million dollars into the Nixon-Agnew campaign. He gave this information to Larry O'Brien, Humphrey's campaign manager. Demetracopoulos urged O'Brien to put this potentially incendiary news before Johnson; CIA Director Richard Helms, Demetracopoulos said, could confirm its accuracy. O'Brien took the story to the President, but Johnson, according to what O'Brien told Demetracopoulos, refused to act on it. He would neither ask Helms to investigate the report nor leak it to the press should it prove to be true. Johnson wanted something to use against Nixon if the Nixon Justice Department started to comb the Johnson Administration for scandal, and Nixon's Greek connection would serve that purpose handsomely.

Only in the final days of the campaign—when Nixon destroyed Johnson's last chance of reaching a peace settlement as President by secretly persuading the Saigon government not to participate in peace talks and thus not to allow an October surprise that could give Humphrey the election—did Johnson try to help Humphrey.

Johnson left it to Humphrey to decide whether to leak Nixon's "treason" on Vietnam. In what the journalist Theodore White called an uncommon act of political decency, Humphrey chose not to make Nixon's sabotaging of peace a last-minute issue in the campaign. Humphrey feared that should Nixon win anyway, accusations against him could provoke a constitutional crisis. Besides, Humphrey and Johnson would need to explain how they had learned of Nixon's actions. They didn't want to reveal the wiretaps and bugs that had brought them the information about Nixon's undermining of the peace talks.

If LBJ had run again in 1968, can there be any doubt that, unlike Humphrey, he would have used Nixon's skulduggery against him in the closing days of the campaign? How different our national perspective would be had Johnson, rather than Nixon, served from 1969 to 1973. ☛



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## Dazzling White Nights

*The prices are low and the standards high at St. Petersburg's summer music festival*

**M**USIC-lovers love to spend time in strange places. Bayreuth is an attractive town with an aristocratic pedigree, but only a Wagnerite attending the festival would choose to spend a night there, let alone the week it takes

for the *Ring* cycle. Though horrifically overrun, baroque Salzburg in summer can be enchanting, but what justifies a stay of more than two days is a busy schedule of concerts and operas. You can see the sights of Spoleto, Aix-en-Provence, or

Savonlinna (all very fine in various ways) in as little as one day. Thank heaven for the polished operas of Glyndebourne, in the rolling hills of East Sussex, less than two hours by rail from London's Victoria

Station, which requires no overnight at all.

St. Petersburg is a very different proposition. Typical tours allot Russia's one-time capital three days, which is scarcely enough to scratch the surface. The State Hermitage Museum, chockablock with old masters to rival Amsterdam's

Rijksmuseum or the Vatican, not to mention a stash of Impressionists that would be the envy of the Musée d'Orsay, in Paris, would reward weeks of study; you're cheating yourself if you give it less than a full day. A summer palace in the countryside will easily fill another (there are many to choose from), which leaves a pitiful one more for the Peter and Paul Fortress, the Nevsky Prospekt, the Bronze Horseman, the parks, the churches . . .

The few visitors likely to do St. Petersburg something like justice are those who come to stay for the music. This is at its best in late June, with the Stars of the White Nights Festival, named in ironic tribute to the nearly Arctic mid-summer, when the sun barely dips below the horizon. Streetlights switched off in May stay off until September, double rainbows can unfurl at a quarter to midnight, and the sky (when clear) dissolves in ivory light, but as for stars of the astronomical variety—for weeks not one pierces the veil of brightness, ever.

**T**EN years ago serious music-lovers did not consider St. Petersburg much of a priority. Then came the sudden flowering of the Kirov Opera and Orchestra. To balletomanes, the name Kirov evokes the dance company, the cradle of such talents as George Balanchine, Rudolph Nureyev, Natalia Makarova, and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Even in its weakest years St. Petersburg's school and troupe ranked as the fountainhead of classicism. For most of the past half century, however, the Kirov Opera has shared with the ballet only a name and a home in the aqua-and-gold Mariinsky Theater. The operatic wing was thought of, if at all, as a bastion of invincible provincialism, undistinguished in every way. But in 1988 a new musical director took over: Valery Gergiev, then thirty-five, lately the chief conductor of the State Orchestra of Armenia. Within seasons he had catapulted the Kirov into the majors, not only in opera but also as a symphonic ensemble. By the mid-nineties Gergiev and the Kirov were fixtures in the West, touring

*The Mariinsky Theater; above, a cathedral's refurbished angel*



DEMETRIO CARBASCO/TONY STONE; ABOVE: NOVOSTI/SOVI-FOTO





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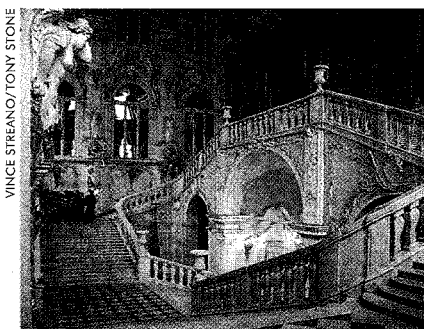
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frequently and producing a steady stream of audio and video recordings for Philips Classics. (For obvious reasons, the finest players are the ones who are taken on the road, but during the summer festival they are dependably in residence.) In opera the Kirov's production values might leave something to be desired, but the musicians' passion, commitment, and sense of spiritual adventure set the pulse racing. Confirmation of the Kirov miracle has come recently in the form of Gergiev's appointment as the first-ever principal guest conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, in New York, which is also presenting the Kirov company this month and next in a mini-season of little-known Russian operas.

It should come as no surprise that Gergiev is also the driving force behind Stars of the White Nights, now in its fifth year, which I have attended twice: first in 1994 and again last year. Both times I found the festival enthralling and unlike any Western counterpart I can think of—occasionally seat-of-the-pants, always aiming for the brass ring. Curtain times reflected the prevailing condition

of creative overdrive: they were wildly unpredictable. Sometimes the public would arrive punctually to find the auditorium bolted while Gergiev and his hardworking orchestra wrapped up a



VINCE STREANO/TONY STONE

### Inside the Hermitage Museum

tardy rehearsal. "Wait until the players discover this is a free country," joked a visiting New Yorker well versed in Western-style union rules. In fact the players never grumbled, though the audience in the lobby might.

Gergiev is keenly aware of St. Petersburg's glorious musical past. Verdi's flawed, brooding masterpiece *La Forza del Destino* was written for the city. Vir-

tually the entire history of Russian opera (Glinka, Borodin, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky) unfolded here. Berlioz and Wagner and Mahler came to present their scores before audiences of eager cognoscenti. Musicians are doing their job when they present the music that most engages them in the best way they know how, but Gergiev's programs almost always have an ulterior agenda: to celebrate St. Petersburg's ancient standing and to recapture it in the present. In reviving *La Forza del Destino* in 1994, Gergiev thus reverted to the all-but-forgotten original of 1862, whose tenor part is so demanding that Plácido Domingo himself is said to consider it unperformable. Gergiev's man—the undaunted Armenian Gegam Grigorian—passed the test, and what was revealed in the process was no preliminary sketch but a thrilling alternative to the *Forza* we know.

Last year Gergiev made music history by resuming St. Petersburg's long-abandoned Wagner tradition with *Parsifal*, a score unheard in Russia since 1918. As devotees know, this is site-specific music with a vengeance. Wagner wrote it

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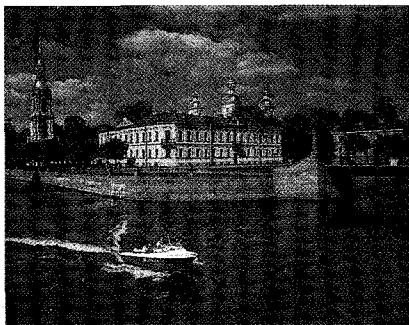
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for his own Festspielhaus in Bayreuth (which was built for his *Ring* cycle), and meant for it to be heard nowhere else. Many believe that its uniquely subtle orchestral palette is irreproducible in any other house. To my ears, the Mariinsky acoustic—transparent yet bejeweled, responsive to the slightest breath—proved more revelatory still. Gergiev's interpretation was revelatory too: diaphanously played, yet richly colored, impassioned, swiftly paced, the drama unblighted by the customary neurasthenia.

There are other musical venues in St. Petersburg, and other performing organizations, well worth exploring. The Shostakovich (or St. Petersburg, formerly the Leningrad) Philharmonic is housed opposite the Grand Hotel Europa in the so-called Large Concert Hall, a white-and-ruby-red affair across whose columns and crystal chandeliers on a clear June night the low northern sun sends dazzling half moons of honeyed light. Chamber music reigns at the gilt-and-stucco Small Concert Hall, a few steps down the Nevsky Prospekt, St. Petersburg's nascent Fifth Avenue. The

Kirov often commandeers these lovely spaces, both of them blessed with warm, clear sound. (The seating, it must be said, is seldom the last word in comfort.) Music programs—all in Cyrillic, which



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### Canals, but no gondolas

to the unpracticed eye may camouflage even familiar names to the point of inscrutability—are posted all over town.

By our standards, tickets to performances in St. Petersburg are a bargain. Scalpers charged \$60 for the hottest ticket at last year's festival (the Kirov's double bill of mildly experimental choreography to Stravinsky), which was thought to be highway robbery. Seats for the

Shostakovich Philharmonic's devastating performance of the Verdi *Requiem*, led by Mariss Jansons with an awesome chorus imported from Tallinn, went for just 50,000 rubles (at last summer's rate of exchange, about \$8.50). I walked into recitals for 15,000 rubles (\$2.60). A little busman's holiday at the Maly Theater, which, like the Kirov, divides its programs between opera and ballet, set me back 150,000 rubles (\$25.50)—serious money in the Russian economy, but 80 percent of the damage was a surcharge extorted from nonresidents. The surcharge, in varying percentages, is also levied at museums.

To judge from the German buses outside and the tour groups within, the Maly caters to a decidedly populist crowd. *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, and *Don Quixote* (the ballet) dominated the repertoire, alongside *La Traviata* and *Don Giovanni*, but there were some surprises, too. My visit was occasioned by a rare showing of *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, a Rimsky-Korsakov fantasy my father (no opera fan) remembered fondly from his Russian youth. Besides, I wanted to check out the Kirov's

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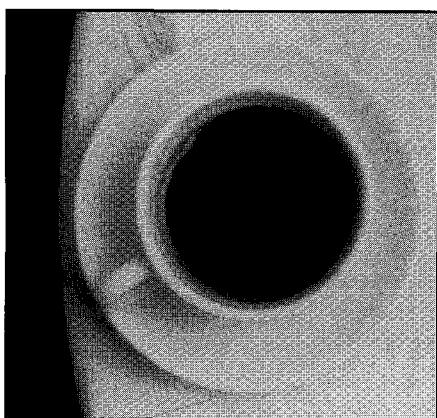


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competition. Entering, I was astonished to discover a second opera house as grand and ornate as the Mariinsky. The show was slick and broad, efficient and impersonal, with plenty of bright costumes and snazzy scene changes to catch the eye: good fun, but scarcely a treat for a snob. About town I noticed other theaters offering similar fare: nothing to tempt a serious music-lover away from the Kirov.

**B**ETWEEN performances, which is to say during the day, one is tempted to tick off first the Hermitage, then palace after palace. The country estates on everyone's A-list are as dazzling as advertised: sprawling, forget-me-not-blue Yekaterinburg, topped with gold onion domes, its façade jammed with butter-scotch-colored giants, its rooms with overripe cherubs; chaste Pavlovsk, exuding decorum in each exquisite neoclassical interior; dignified Peterhof, a Baltic Versailles, surrounded by fountains and outbuildings all but infinite in their variety. On a forced march, though, they begin to feel interchangeable.

Parks and gardens in the center of town offer welcome respite. A special favorite of mine is the slightly disheveled maze of the Letniy Sad, or Summer Garden, densely studded with handsome marble statuary. Refreshed by an hour beneath the canopy of towering trees, I set out to pay my respects to Peter the Great, visiting his three-room log cabin (painted to mimic brick), the tiny boat he learned to sail on, and a life-size wooden mannequin of him, dressed in his own French court dress, the wax face and hands molded from life, the hair Peter's own, clipped and saved in the hot summer of 1722. I also gave a good deal of time to the Russian State Museum, housed in various mansions, where one may trace the tectonic shifts in Russian art, from the age of icons, before Peter, to the eighteenth century, when fashionable St. Petersburg imported French and Italian painters by the cartload, and on to the nineteenth, when talented Russians learned their craft in Paris and brought it home.

I also tiptoed into the Mosque, modeled on the resting place of Tamerlane, in Samarkand. Like virtually every other place of worship I visited in St. Petersburg, it bore the marks of long neglect. Yet deep in the sanctuary, scarcely visible in the gloom, perhaps four or five Muslims knelt at their quiet devotions. And at Kazan Cathedral, which the Communists coopted for their Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism, where schoolchildren used to enjoy waxworks of the Spanish Inquisition, fervent young men with scraggly beards and well-turned-out women now ply icons with kisses. I also walked in on the baptism of a gurgling neonate surrounded by adoring family and friends. After years of suppression, the opiate of the people is staging quite a comeback, even as Western-style materialism moves in. In the heart of the Petrograd quarter, north of the Neva, where tourists seldom stray, one finds princely turn-of-the-century apartment blocks in various states of decrepitude and reclamation, along with high-ticket fashion outlets (Escada, Bally). Suits in one store, I was told, started at \$1,500—but not a nickel is spent on window dressing. The grime-encrusted façades of the chic shopping boulevards look as unkempt, bereft, and Godforsaken as those of the old-fashioned butcher shops in the Soviet-style working-class neighborhoods.

**S**T. Petersburg in our time is not one city but two—both to a high degree unreal—superimposed on a single ground

plan. For most of the twentieth century one of those cities was no more than a memory. Glittering St. Petersburg! Peter the Great's new capital on the flat marshlands of the Gulf of Finland, known informally as Petersburg and fondly as Peter, created *ex nihilo* by imperial fiat in 1703, was the Czar's "window on Europe," under the protection of his patron

saint. The proud beauty of this baroque "Venice of the North" was mirrored in the waters of the vast Baltic, the broad Neva, and threading canals. The city was the

TIM KENNEDY/TONY STONE

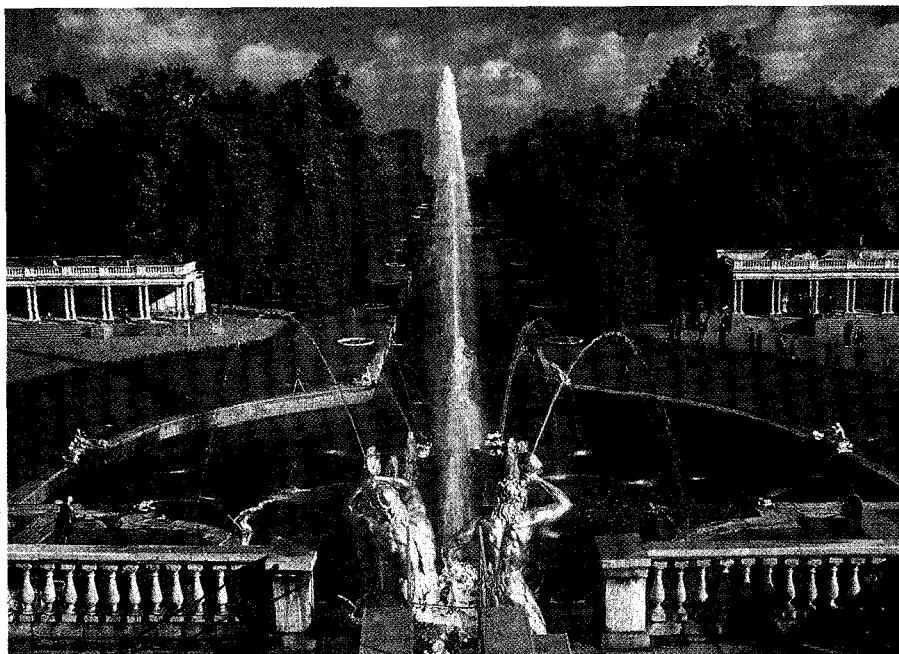


**Letniy Sad**



north's de facto Paris, too, an intellectual and cultural magnet where the language of those who mattered was French.

The Communist era, of course, put an end to all that. The city's native character ceased to exist except in the pages of Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky—and the antic Andrei Bely, whose magnum opus, *Petersburg*, Vladimir Nabokov ranked among the supreme masterpieces



MARTY LOKEN/TONY STONE, ABOVE; FRITZ DRESSLER/FOCUS-MATRIX; BELOW: TASS/SOVPHOTO



*Above, Peterhof and its gardens, often compared to Versailles; left, the Mariinsky*

of twentieth-century prose, trailing only *Ulysses* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, and ahead of the first half of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. In St. Petersburg's place lay grim Leningrad. Leningrad: a capital no longer, forsaken by officialdom for old, backward Moscow, yet vouchsafed the honor of perpetuating the memory of the prophet of the Red ideology; a border fortress on the plains, exposed to much of an apocalyptic century's cruelest war, plague, death, and famine, its endurance unbroken by the Nazi siege of 900 days. Leningrad: a stage set for newsreels, with Shostakovich blaring on the soundtrack. For Bely, *this* would have

been the purely imaginary place. "If Petersburg is not the capital," he wrote at the start of his novel, "then there is no Petersburg. It only appears to exist."

Today Leningrad lingers in seven decades' worth of dirt and dilapidation. It lingers, too, in a Soviet legacy of bureaucracy, suspicion, underhandedness, and xenophobia. A foreigner divines these things in subtle and not-so-subtle attitudes ranging from apathy and lack of cooperation to chips on the shoulder. Despite those surcharges at museums, palaces, and theaters, whereby foreign visitors (comparatively few in number) in effect subsidize the admission of Russians, few provisions—multilingual wall labels, foreign-language tours—are made for the foreigner's convenience. (You want an English-speaking guide? Bring your own.) There are museums within museums, pavilions within parks, each requiring a separate trip to a dif-

ferent, usually inconvenient, ticket office. Sooner or later one bridles, to no immediate avail.

But Leningrad never quite extinguished the last sparks of the St. Petersburg spirit. Call it counterrevolutionary, call it ideologically unsound, but after the war Soviet officialdom spent lavish sums to replicate shattered palaces to picture-perfection. Despite what must have been sore temptation, they kept their hands off the artistic treasures of the Hermitage, which could so easily have been converted into much-needed cash. They diverted funds from utilitarian uses to maintain the prestige of the ballet. At the same time, they preserved a cult of painful memories: even now, sooner or later almost any tour through any palace leads to a display of blurry black-and-whites of charred roof beams on the grand-ballroom floor.

Today movers and shakers in government and private enterprise are working feverishly toward the city's tercentennial, in 2003. What they hope to conjure into existence, as near as I can picture, is a third-millennium St. Petersburg fully worthy of the name, unreal no longer: spires and domes and pastel palaces glistening like new, harmonizing with construction of the present age, peopled by citizens of cosmopolitan outlook. A tall order, but Peter is changing quickly. Meanwhile, there is the music. ♫

*Booking travel in Russia has not grown much easier since the fall of communism. Even self-reliant travelers are well advised to turn over the nuisance details (visa, land arrangements) to a knowledgeable agent. For music tours in Russia, packages or customized, Allegro Enterprises (212-666-6700; 800-666-3553 outside New York) gets high marks; not incidentally, the company is also the exclusive U.S. outlet for tickets to the Kirov and other leading Russian companies. If you are traveling alone or in your own small group, it saves precious hours to hire a car and driver for all excursions to the St. Petersburg countryside and also for ambitious days of sightseeing in town. Rates quoted by concierges at major hotels are high, but independent operators ask for much less and will negotiate. I found Dmitry Ageev (mobile phone 987-52-32), recommended by a filmmaker working at the Kirov, to be thoroughly reliable. He drives safely, his car is clean and smoke-free, and he puts in a long day for \$100 (negotiable). Shorter runs, too, are very reasonable.*

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in the forest,  
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# The Biological Basis of Morality

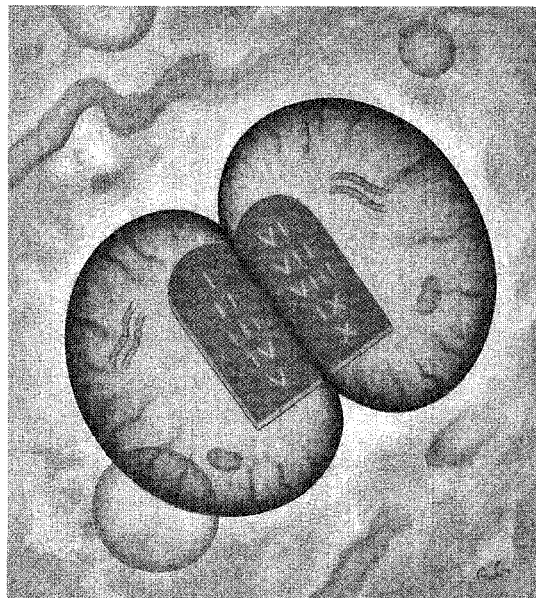
by EDWARD O. WILSON

*Do we invent our moral absolutes in order to make society workable? Or are these enduring principles expressed to us by some transcendent or Godlike authority? Efforts to resolve this conundrum have perplexed, sometimes inflamed, our best minds for centuries, but the natural sciences are telling us more and more about the choices we make and our reasons for making them*

CENTURIES of debate on the origin of ethics come down to this: Either ethical principles, such as justice and human rights, are independent of human experience, or they are human inventions. The distinction is more than an exercise for academic philosophers. The choice between these two understandings makes all the difference in the way we view ourselves as a species. It measures the authority of religion, and it determines the conduct of moral reasoning.

The two assumptions in competition are like islands in a sea of chaos, as different as life and death, matter and the void. One cannot learn which is correct by pure logic; the answer will eventually be reached through an accumulation of objective evidence. Moral reasoning, I believe, is at every level intrinsically consilient with—compatible with, intertwined with—the natural sciences. (I use a form of the word “consilience”—literally a “jumping together” of knowledge as a result of the linking of facts and fact-based theory across disciplines to create a common groundwork of explanation—because its rarity has preserved its precision.)

Every thoughtful person has an opinion on which premise



is correct. But the split is not, as popularly supposed, between religious believers and secularists. It is between transcendentalists, who think that moral guidelines exist outside the human mind, and empiricists, who think them contrivances of the mind. In simplest terms, the options are as follows: *I believe in the independence of moral values, whether from God or not, and I believe that moral values come from human beings alone, whether or not God exists.*

Theologians and philosophers have almost always focused on transcendentalism as the means to validate ethics. They seek the grail of natural law, which comprises freestanding principles of moral conduct immune to doubt and compromise. Christian theologians, following Saint Thomas Aquinas's reasoning in *Summa Theologiae*, by and large consider natural law to be an expression of God's will. In this view, human beings have an obligation to discover the law by diligent reasoning and to weave it into the routine of their daily lives. Secular philosophers of a transcendental bent may seem to be radically different from theologians, but they are actually quite similar, at least in moral reasoning. They tend to view natural law as a set of principles so powerful, whatever their origin, as to be self-

evident to any rational person. In short, transcendental views are fundamentally the same whether God is invoked or not.

For example, when Thomas Jefferson, following John Locke, derived the doctrine of natural rights from natural law, he was more concerned with the power of transcendental statements than with their origin, divine or secular. In the Declaration of Independence he blended secular and religious presumptions in one transcendentalist sentence, thus deftly covering all bets: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." That assertion became the cardinal premise of America's civil religion, the righteous sword wielded by Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., and it endures as the central ethic binding together the diverse peoples of the United States.

So compelling are such fruits of natural-law theory, especially when the Deity is also invoked, that they may seem to place the transcendentalist assumption beyond question. But to its noble successes must be added appalling failures. It has been perverted many times in the past—used, for example, to argue passionately for colonial conquest, slavery, and genocide. Nor was any great war ever fought without each side thinking its cause transcendently sacred in some manner or other.

So perhaps we need to take empiricism more seriously. In the empiricist view, ethics is conduct favored consistently enough throughout a society to be expressed as a code of principles. It reaches its precise form in each culture according to historical circumstance. The codes, whether adjudged good or evil by outsiders, play an important role in determining which cultures flourish and which decline.

The crux of the empiricist view is its emphasis on objective knowledge. Because the success of an ethical code depends on how wisely it interprets moral sentiments, those who frame one should know how the brain works, and how the mind develops. The success of ethics also depends on how accurately a society can predict the consequences of particular actions as opposed to others, especially in cases of moral ambiguity.

The empiricist argument holds that if we explore the biological roots of moral behavior, and explain their material

origins and biases, we should be able to fashion a wise and enduring ethical consensus. The current expansion of scientific inquiry into the deeper processes of human thought makes this venture feasible.

The choice between transcendentalism and empiricism will be the coming century's version of the struggle for men's souls. Moral reasoning will either remain centered in idioms of theology and philosophy, where it is now, or shift toward science-based material analysis. Where it settles will depend on which world view is proved correct, or at least which is more widely *perceived* to be correct.

Ethicists, scholars who specialize in moral reasoning, tend not to declare themselves on the foundations of ethics, or to admit fallibility. Rarely do we see an argument that opens

with the simple statement *This is my starting point, and it could be wrong*. Ethicists instead favor a fretful passage from the particular to the ambiguous, or the reverse—vagueness into hard cases. I suspect that almost all are transcendentalists at heart, but they rarely say so in simple declarative sentences. One cannot blame them very much; explaining the ineffable is difficult.

I am an empiricist. On religion I lean toward deism, but consider its proof largely a problem in astrophysics. The existence of a God who created the universe (as envisioned by deism) is possible, and the question may eventually be settled, perhaps by forms of material evidence not yet imagined. Or the matter may be forever beyond human reach. In contrast, and of far greater importance to humanity, the idea of a biological God, one who directs organic evolution and intervenes in human affairs (as envisioned by theism), is in-

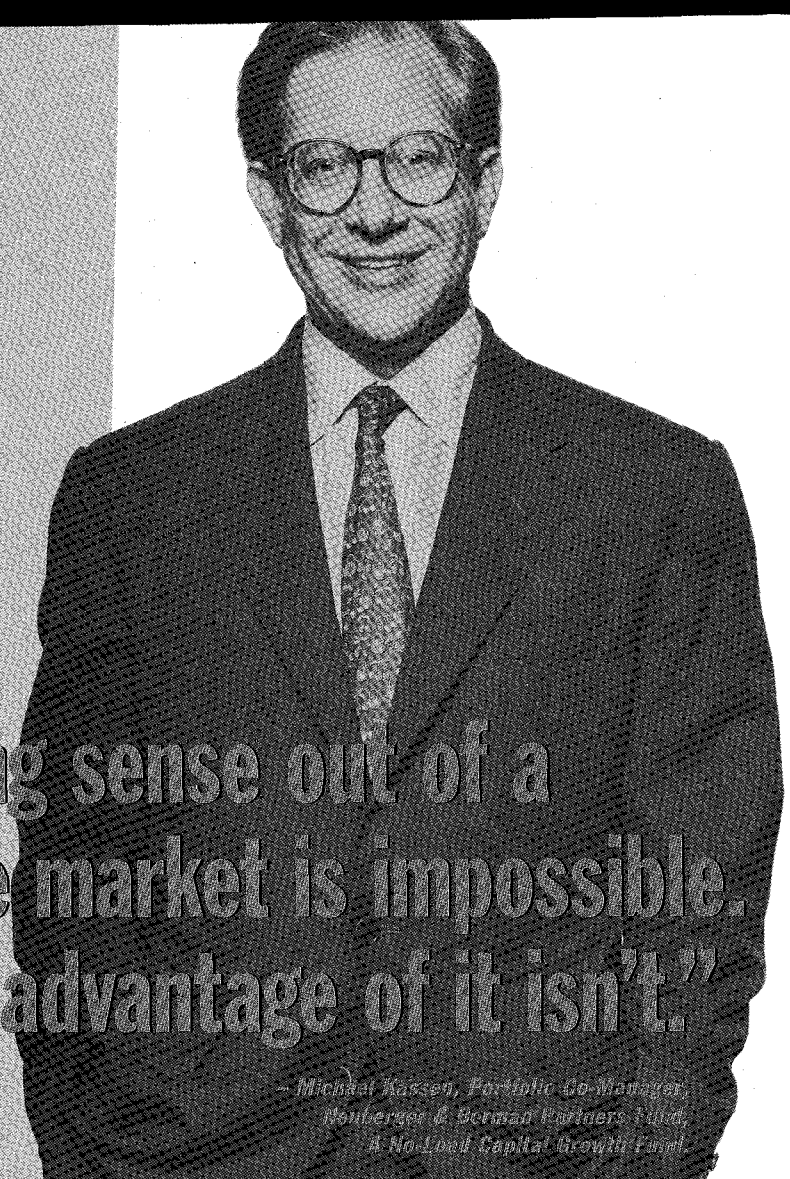
creasingly contravened by biology and the brain sciences.

The same evidence, I believe, favors a purely material origin of ethics, and it meets the criterion of consilience: causal explanations of brain activity and evolution, while imperfect, already cover most facts known about behavior we term "moral." Although this conception is relativistic (in other words, dependent on personal viewpoint), it can, if evolved carefully, lead more directly and safely to stable moral codes than can transcendentalism, which is also, when one thinks about it, ultimately relativistic.

Of course, lest I forget, I may be wrong.

**EACH KIND OF  
 ANIMAL IS GUIDED  
 THROUGH ITS LIFE CYCLE  
 BY UNIQUE AND OFTEN  
 ELABORATE SETS OF  
 INSTINCTUAL ALGORITHMS.  
 WE MAY REASONABLY  
 CONCLUDE THAT HUMAN  
 BEHAVIOR ORIGINATED  
 THE SAME WAY.**





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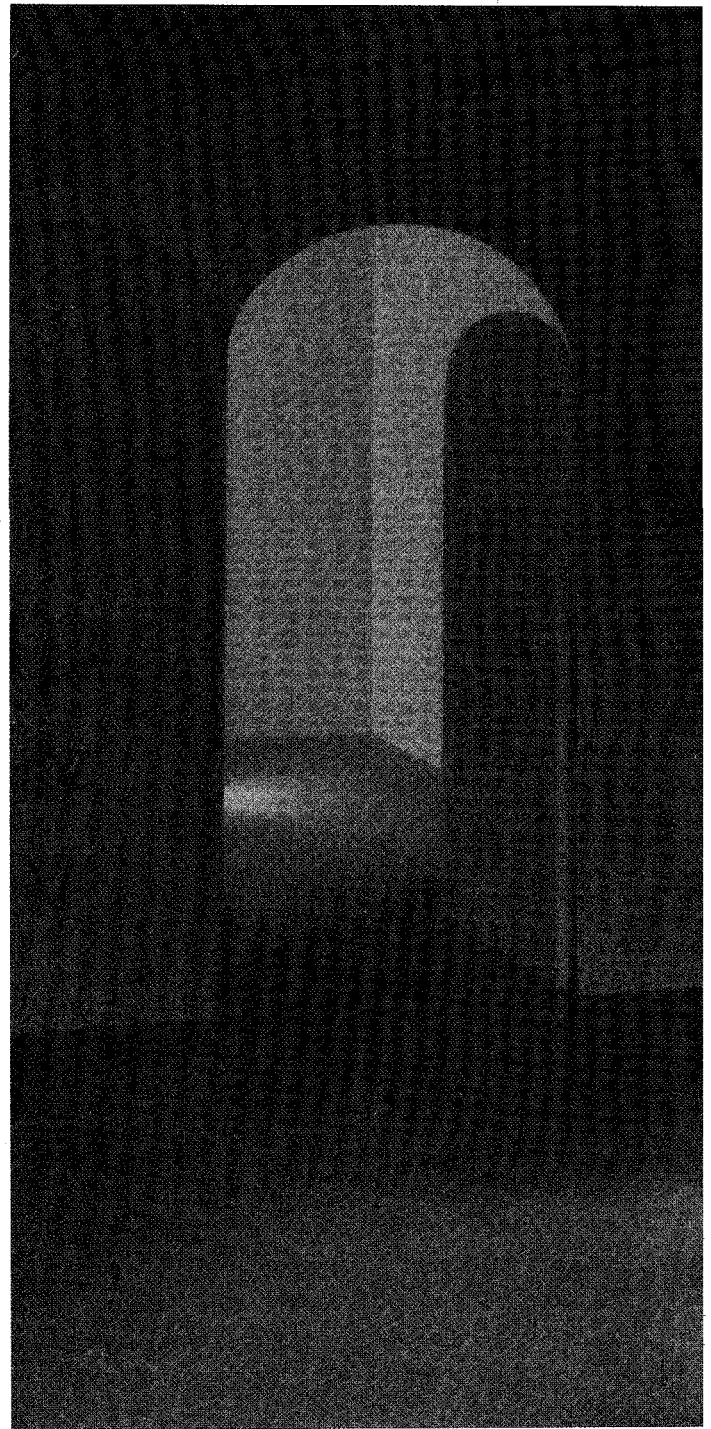
## Transcendentalism Versus Empiricism

**T**HE argument of the empiricist has roots that go back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and, in the beginning of the modern era, to David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740). The first clear evolutionary elaboration of it was by Charles Darwin, in *The Descent of Man* (1871).

Again, religious transcendentalism is bolstered by secular transcendentalism, to which it is fundamentally similar. Immanuel Kant, judged by history the greatest of secular philosophers, addressed moral reasoning very much as a theologian. Human beings, he argued, are independent moral agents with a wholly free will, capable of obeying or breaking moral law: "There is in man a power of self-determination, independent of any coercion through sensuous impulses." Our minds are subject to a categorical imperative, Kant said, of what our actions ought to be. The imperative is a good in itself alone, apart from all other considerations, and it can be recognized by this rule: "Act only on that maxim you wish will become a universal law." Most important, and transcendental, *ought* has no place in nature. Nature, Kant said, is a system of cause and effect, whereas moral choice is a matter of free will, absent cause and effect. In making moral choices, in rising above mere instinct, human beings transcend the realm of nature and enter a realm of freedom that belongs exclusively to them as rational creatures.

Now, this formulation has a comforting feel to it, but it makes no sense at all in terms of either material or imaginable entities, which is why Kant, even apart from his tortured prose, is so hard to understand. Sometimes a concept is baffling not because it is profound but because it is wrong. This idea does not accord, we know now, with the evidence of how the brain works.

In *Principia Ethica* (1903), G. E. Moore, the founder of modern ethical philosophy, essentially agreed with Kant. In his view, moral reasoning cannot dip into psychology and the social sciences in order to locate ethical principles, because those disciplines yield only a causal picture and fail to illuminate the basis of moral justification. So to reach the normative *ought* by way of the factual *is* is to commit a basic error of logic, which Moore called the naturalistic fallacy. John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), once again traveled the transcendental road. He offered the very plausible suggestion that justice be defined as fairness, which is to be accepted as an intrinsic good. It is the imperative we would follow if we had no starting information about our own future status in life. But in making such a suggestion Rawls ventured no thought on where the human brain comes from or how it works. He offered no evidence that justice-as-fairness is consistent with human nature, hence practicable as a blan-



ket premise. Probably it is, but how can we know except by blind trial and error?

Had Kant, Moore, and Rawls known modern biology and experimental psychology, they might well not have reasoned as they did. Yet as this century closes, transcendentalism remains firm in the hearts not just of religious believers but also of countless scholars in the social sciences and the humanities who, like Moore and Rawls, have chosen to insulate their thinking from the natural sciences.

Many philosophers will respond by saying, Ethicists don't need that kind of information. You really can't pass from *is*





to *ought*. You can't describe a genetic predisposition and suppose that because it is part of human nature, it is somehow transformed into an ethical precept. We must put moral reasoning in a special category, and use transcendental guidelines as required.

No, we do not have to put moral reasoning in a special category and use transcendental premises, because the posing of the naturalistic fallacy is itself a fallacy. For if *ought* is not *is*, what is? To translate *is* into *ought* makes sense if we attend to the objective meaning of ethical precepts. They are very unlikely to be ethereal messages awaiting revelation,

or independent truths vibrating in a nonmaterial dimension of the mind. They are more likely to be products of the brain and the culture. From the consilient perspective of the natural sciences, they are no more than principles of the social contract hardened into rules and dictates—the behavioral codes that members of a society fervently wish others to follow and are themselves willing to accept for the common good. Precepts are the extreme on a scale of agreements that range from casual assent, to public sentiment, to law, to that part of the canon considered sacred and unalterable. The scale applied to adultery might read as follows:

*Let's not go further; it doesn't feel right, and it may lead to trouble. (Maybe we ought not.)*

*Adultery not only causes feelings of guilt but is generally disapproved of by society. (We probably ought not.)*

*Adultery isn't just disapproved of; it's against the law. (We almost certainly ought not.)*

*God commands that we avoid this mortal sin. (We absolutely ought not.)*

In transcendental thinking, the chain of causation runs downward from the given *ought* in religion or natural law through jurisprudence to education and finally to individual choice. The argument from transcendentalism takes the following general form: *The order of nature contains supreme principles, either divine or intrinsic, and we will be wise to learn about them and find the means to conform to them.* Thus John Rawls opens *A Theory of Justice* with a proposition he regards as irrevocable: "In a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests." As many critiques have made clear, that premise can lead to unhappy consequences when applied to the real world, including a tightening of social control and a decline in personal initiative. A very different premise, therefore, is suggested by Robert Nozick in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974): "Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights). So strong and far-reaching are these rights that they raise the question of what, if anything, the state and its officials may do." Rawls would point us toward egalitarianism regulated by the state, Nozick toward libertarianism in a minimalist state.

The empiricist view, in contrast, searching for an origin of ethical reasoning that can be objectively studied, reverses the chain of causation. The individual is seen as predisposed biologically to make certain choices. Through cultural evolution some of the choices are hardened into precepts, then into laws, and, if the predisposition or coercion is strong enough, into a belief in the command of God or the natural order of the universe. The general empiricist principle takes this form: *Strong innate feeling and historical experience cause certain actions to be preferred; we have experienced them, and have weighed their consequences, and agree to conform with codes that express them. Let us take an oath upon the codes, invest our personal honor in them, and suffer punishment for their violation.* The empiricist view concedes that moral codes are devised to conform to some drives of human nature and to suppress others. *Ought* is the translation not of human nature but of the public will, which can be made increasingly wise and stable through an understanding of the needs and pitfalls of human nature. The empiricist view recognizes that the strength of commitment can wane as a result of new knowledge and experience, with the result that certain

rules may be desacralized, old laws rescinded, and formerly prohibited behavior set free. It also recognizes that for the same reason new moral codes may need to be devised, with the potential of being made sacred in time.

## The Origin of Moral Instincts

**I**F the empiricist world view is correct, *ought* is just shorthand for one kind of factual statement, a word that denotes what society first chose (or was coerced) to do, and then codified. The naturalistic fallacy is thereby reduced to the naturalistic problem. The solution of the problem is not difficult: *ought* is the product of a material process. The solution points the way to an objective grasp of the origin of ethics.

A few investigators are now embarked on just such a foundational inquiry. Most agree that ethical codes have arisen by evolution through the interplay of biology and culture. In a sense these investigators are reviving the idea of moral sentiments that was developed in the eighteenth century by the British empiricists Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith.

What have been thought of as moral sentiments are now taken to mean moral instincts (as defined by the modern behavioral sciences), subject to judgment according to their consequences. Such sentiments are thus derived from epigenetic rules—hereditary biases in mental development, usually conditioned by emotion, that influence concepts and decisions made from them. The primary origin of moral instincts is the dynamic relation between cooperation and defection. The essential ingredient for the molding of the instincts during genetic evolution in any species is intelligence high enough to judge and manipulate the tension generated by the dynamism. That level of intelligence allows the building of complex mental scenarios well into the future. It occurs, so far as is known, only in human beings and perhaps their closest relatives among the higher apes.

A way of envisioning the hypothetical earliest stages of moral evolution is provided by game theory, particularly the solutions to the famous Prisoner's Dilemma. Consider the following typical scenario of the dilemma. Two gang members have been arrested for murder and are being questioned separately. The evidence against them is strong but not irrefutable. The first gang member believes that if he turns state's witness, he will be granted immunity and his partner will be sentenced to life in prison. But he is also aware that his partner has the same option, and that if both of them exercise it, neither will be granted immunity. That is the dilemma. Will the two gang members independently defect, so that both take the hard fall? They will not, because they agreed in advance to remain silent if caught. By doing so, both hope to be convicted on a lesser charge or escape punish-



ment altogether. Criminal gangs have turned this principle of calculation into an ethical precept: Never rat on another member; always be a stand-up guy. Honor does exist among thieves. The gang is a society of sorts; its code is the same as that of a captive soldier in wartime, obliged to give only name, rank, and serial number.

In one form or another, comparable dilemmas that are solvable by cooperation occur constantly and everywhere in daily life. The payoff is variously money, status, power, sex, access, comfort, or health. Most of these proximate rewards are converted into the universal bottom line of Darwinian genetic fitness: greater longevity and a secure, growing family.

And so it has most likely always been. Imagine a Paleolithic band of five hunters. One considers breaking away from the others to look for an antelope on his own. If successful, he will gain a large quantity of meat and hide—five times as much as if he stays with the band and they are successful. But he knows from experience that his chances of success are very low, much less than the chances of the band of five working together. In addition, whether successful alone or not, he will suffer animosity from the others for lessening their prospects. By custom the band members remain together and share equitably the animals they kill. So the hunter stays. He also observes good manners in doing so, especially if he is the one who makes the kill. Boastful pride is condemned, because it rips the delicate web of reciprocity.

Now suppose that human propensities to cooperate or defect are heritable: some people are innately more cooperative, others less so. In this respect moral aptitude would simply be like almost all other mental traits studied to date. Among traits with documented heritability, those closest to moral aptitude are empathy with the distress of others and certain processes of attachment between infants and their caregivers. To the heritability of moral aptitude add the abundant evidence of history that cooperative individuals generally survive longer and leave more offspring. Following that reasoning, in the course of evolutionary history genes predisposing people toward cooperative behavior would have come to predominate in the human population as a whole.

Such a process repeated through thousands of generations inevitably gave rise to moral sentiments. With the exception of psychopaths (if any truly exist), every person vividly experiences these instincts variously as conscience, self-respect, remorse, empathy, shame, humility, and moral outrage. They bias cultural evolution toward the conventions that express the universal moral codes of honor, patriotism, altruism, justice, compassion, mercy, and redemption.

The dark side of the inborn propensity to moral behavior is xenophobia. Because personal familiarity and common interest are vital in social transactions, moral sentiments evolved to be selective. People give trust to strangers with effort, and true compassion is a commodity in chronically short supply. Tribes cooperate only through carefully defined

treaties and other conventions. They are quick to imagine themselves the victims of conspiracies by competing groups, and they are prone to dehumanize and murder their rivals during periods of severe conflict. They cement their own group loyalties by means of sacred symbols and ceremonies. Their mythologies are filled with epic victories over menacing enemies.

The complementary instincts of morality and tribalism are easily manipulated. Civilization has made them more so. Beginning about 10,000 years ago, a tick in geological time, when the agricultural revolution started in the Middle East, in China, and in Mesoamerica, populations increased tenfold in density over those of hunter-gatherer societies. Families settled on small plots of land, villages proliferated, and labor was finely divided as a growing minority of the populace specialized as craftsmen, traders, and

soldiers. The rising agricultural societies became increasingly hierarchical. As chiefdoms and then states thrived on agricultural surpluses, hereditary rulers and priestly castes took power. The old ethical codes were transformed into coercive regulations, always to the advantage of the ruling classes. About this time the idea of law-giving gods originated. Their commands lent the ethical codes overpowering authority—once again, no surprise, in the interests of the rulers.

Because of the technical difficulty of analyzing such phenomena in an objective manner, and because people resist biological explanations of their higher cortical functions in

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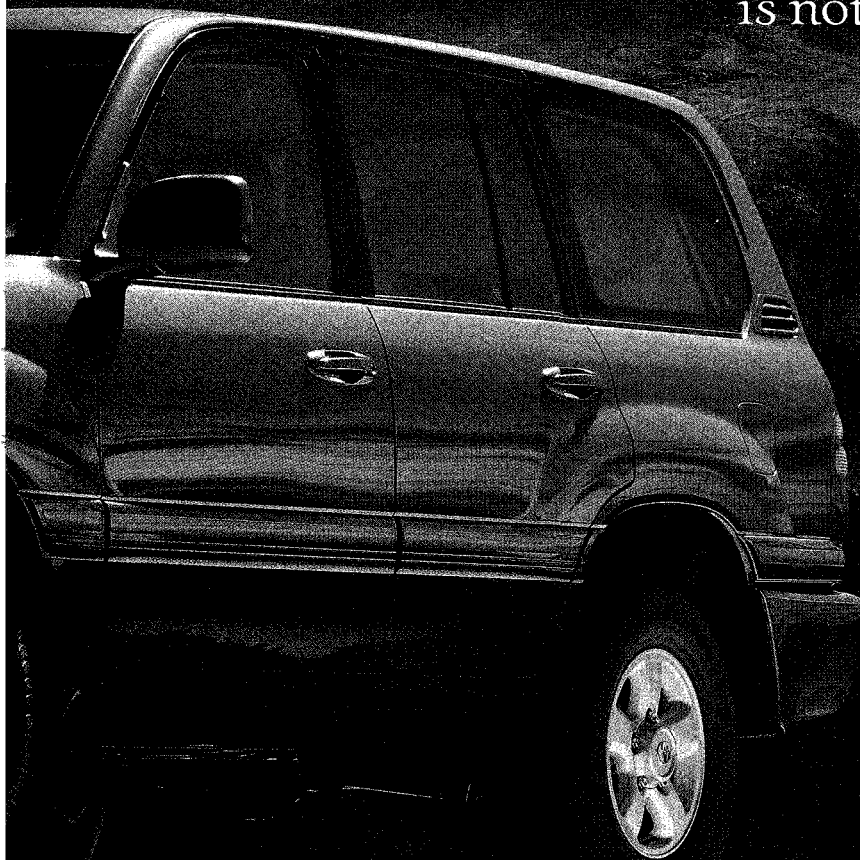
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the first place, very little progress has been made in the biological exploration of the moral sentiments. Even so, it is astonishing that the study of ethics has advanced so little since the nineteenth century. The most distinguishing and vital qualities of the human species remain a blank space on the scientific map. I doubt that discussions of ethics should rest upon the freestanding assumptions of contemporary philosophers who have evidently never given thought to the evolutionary origin and material functioning of the human brain. In no other domain of the humanities is a union with the natural sciences more urgently needed.

When the ethical dimension of human nature is at last fully opened to such exploration, the innate epigenetic rules of moral reasoning will probably not prove to be aggregated into simple instincts such as bonding, cooperativeness, and altruism. Instead the rules will most probably turn out to be an ensemble of many algorithms, whose interlocking activities guide the mind across a landscape of nuanced moods and choices.

Such a prestructured mental world may at first seem too

complicated to have been created by autonomous genetic evolution alone. But all the evidence of biology suggests that just this process was enough to spawn the millions of species of life surrounding us. Each kind of animal is furthermore guided through its life cycle by unique and often elaborate sets of instinctual algorithms, many of which are beginning to yield to genetic and neurobiological analyses. With all these examples before us, we may reasonably conclude that human behavior originated the same way.

### A Scientific Approach to Moral Reasoning

**M**EANWHILE, the mélanges of moral reasoning employed by modern societies are, to put the matter simply, a mess. They are chimeras, composed of odd parts stuck together. Paleolithic egalitarian and tribalistic instincts are still firmly installed. As part of the genetic foundation of human nature, they cannot be replaced. In some cases, such as quick hostility to strangers and compet-

## WINTER BARN

A light slant snow dragging the fields, a counterwind  
where the edges of the barn frayed worlds,

blurred outside in. This is what my love could give me  
instead of children—the dusk as presence, moth-like,

and with a moth's dust-colored flickering stall by stall,  
some empty now, certain gone to slaughter, driven north

in open trucks over potholed, frozen roads.  
Such a hard ride to bloodlet, blankness, the stalls' stone

floors hosed out, yet damp, the urine reek not quite  
muffled with fresh hay, trough water still giving  
back lantern

light like ponds at nightfall. Sheep lay steaming, cloud  
in cloud. The barn cat slept among last summer's  
lambs, black

faced, apart, relieved of their mothers. We made our way,  
my dogs and I, to say hello to the Yorkshire sow

named Kora, who heaved herself up to greet us,  
let the dogs lick her oiled snout smeared with feed

while I scratched her forehead. Kora of the swineherds  
fallen with Persephone, perhaps in hell a bride's only company.

Prodigal, planetary, Kora's great-spined, strict-bristled body  
wore the black mud of a cold, righteous creation,

burrs and mugwort plastered at the gates.  
Days her smell stayed with us. The last time we saw her

the plaque bearing her name was gone. Maybe she  
would be mated.

Sparrows sailed the barn's doomed girth, forsaken,

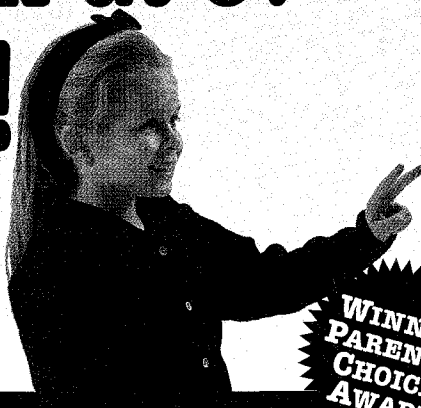
therefore free. They lit on rafters crossing the west windows  
that flared at sunset like a furnace fed on stars.

—DEBORAH DIGGES



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ing groups, they have become generally ill adapted and persistently dangerous. Above the fundamental instincts rise superstructures of arguments and rules that accommodate the novel institutions created by cultural evolution. These accommodations, which reflect the attempt to maintain order and further tribal interests, have been too volatile to track by genetic evolution; they are not yet in the genes.

Little wonder, then, that ethics is the most publicly contested of all philosophical enterprises. Or that political science, which at its foundation is primarily the study of applied ethics, is so frequently problematic. Neither is informed by anything that would be recognizable as authentic theory in the natural sciences. Both ethics and political science lack a foundation of verifiable knowledge of human nature sufficient to produce cause-and-effect predictions and sound judgments based on them. Surely closer attention must be paid to the deep springs of ethical behavior. The greatest void in knowledge for such a venture is the biology of moral sentiments. In time this subject can be understood, I believe, by paying attention to the following topics:

- *The definition of moral sentiments*, first by precise descriptions from experimental psychology and then by analysis of the underlying neural and endocrine responses.
- *The genetics of moral sentiments*, most easily approached through measurements of the heritability of the psychological and physiological processes of ethical behavior, and eventually, with difficulty, through identification of the prescribing genes.
- *The development of moral sentiments as products of the interactions of genes and the environment*. Research is most effective when conducted at two levels: the histories of ethical systems as part of the emergence of different cultures, and the cognitive development of individuals living in a variety of cultures. Such investigations are already well along in anthropology and psychology. In the future they will be augmented by contributions from biology.
- *The deep history of moral sentiments*—why they exist in the first place. Presumably they contributed to survival and reproductive success during the long periods of prehistoric time in which they genetically evolved.

From a convergence of these several approaches the true origin and meaning of ethical behavior may come into focus. If so, a more certain measure can then be taken of the strength and flexibility of the epigenetic rules composing the various moral sentiments. From that knowledge it should be possible to adapt ancient moral sentiments more wisely to the swiftly changing conditions of modern life into which, willy-nilly and largely in ignorance, we have plunged.

Then new answers might be found to the truly important questions of moral reasoning. How can the moral instincts be ranked? Which are best subdued and to what degree? Which should be validated by law and symbol? How can precepts be left open to appeal under extraordinary circumstances? In the new understanding can be located the most

effective means for reaching consensus. No one can guess the exact form that agreements will take from one culture to the next. The process, however, can be predicted with assurance. It will be democratic, weakening the clash of rival religions and ideologies. History is moving decisively in that direction, and people are by nature too bright and too contentious to abide anything else. And the pace can be confidently predicted: change will come slowly, across generations, because old beliefs die hard, even when they are demonstrably false.

### The Origins of Religion

**T**HE same reasoning that aligns ethical philosophy with science can also inform the study of religion. Religions are analogous to organisms. They have a life cycle. They

are born, they grow, they compete, they reproduce, and, in the fullness of time, most die. In each of these phases religions reflect the human organisms that nourish them. They express a primary rule of human existence: Whatever is necessary to sustain life is also ultimately biological.

Successful religions typically begin as cults, which then increase in power and inclusiveness until they achieve tolerance outside the circle of believers. At the core of each religion is a creation myth, which explains how the world began and how the chosen people—those subscribing to the belief system—arrived at its center. Often a mystery, a set of secret

# SCIENTISTS FROM ANOTHER PLANET WOULD NOTICE IMMEDIATELY THE PARALLELS BETWEEN ANIMAL DOMINANCE BEHAVIOR ON THE ONE HAND AND HUMAN OBEISANCE TO RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL AUTHORITY ON THE OTHER.



instructions and formulas, is available to members who have worked their way to a higher state of enlightenment. The medieval Jewish cabala, the trigadal system of Freemasonry, and the carvings on Australian aboriginal spirit sticks are examples of such arcana. Power radiates from the center, gathering converts and binding followers to the group. Sacred places are designated, where the gods can be importuned, rites observed, and miracles witnessed.

The devotees of the religion compete as a tribe with those of other religions. They harshly resist the dismissal of their beliefs by rivals. They venerate self-sacrifice in defense of the religion.

The tribalistic roots of religion are similar to those of moral reasoning and may be identical. Religious rites, such as burial ceremonies, are very old. It appears that in the late Paleolithic period in Europe and the Middle East bodies were sometimes placed in shallow graves, accompanied by ocher or blossoms; one can easily imagine such ceremonies performed to invoke spirits and gods. But, as theoretical deduction and the evidence suggest, the primitive elements of moral behavior are far older than Paleolithic ritual. Religion arose on a foundation of ethics, and it has probably always been used in one manner or another to justify moral codes.

The formidable influence of the religious drive is based on far more, however, than just the validation of morals. A great subterranean river of the mind, it gathers strength from a broad spread of tributary emotions. Foremost among them is the survival instinct. "Fear," as the Roman poet Lucretius said, "was the first thing on earth to make the gods." Our conscious minds hunger for a permanent existence. If we cannot have everlasting life of the body, then absorption into some immortal whole will serve. *Anything* will serve, as long as it gives the individual meaning and somehow stretches into eternity that swift passage of the mind and spirit lamented by Saint Augustine as the short day of time.

The understanding and control of life is another source of religious power. Doctrine draws on the same creative springs as science and the arts, its aim being the extraction of order from the mysteries and tumult of the material world. To explain the meaning of life it spins mythic narratives of the tribal history, populating the cosmos with protective spirits and gods. The existence of the supernatural, if accepted, testifies to the existence of that other world so desperately desired.

Religion is also mightily empowered by its principal ally, tribalism. The shamans and priests implore us, in somber cadence, *Trust in the sacred rituals, become part of the immortal force, you are one of us. As your life unfolds, each step has mystic significance that we who love you will mark with a solemn rite of passage, the last to be performed when you enter that second world, free of pain and fear.*

If the religious mythos did not exist in a culture, it would

quickly be invented, and in fact it has been invented everywhere, thousands of times through history. Such inevitability is the mark of instinctual behavior in any species, which is guided toward certain states by emotion-driven rules of mental development. To call religion instinctive is not to suppose that any particular part of its mythos is untrue—only that its sources run deeper than ordinary habit and are in fact hereditary, urged into existence through biases in mental development that are encoded in the genes.

Such biases are a predictable consequence of the brain's genetic evolution. The logic applies to religious behavior, with the added twist of tribalism. There is a hereditary selective advantage to membership in a powerful group united by devout belief and purpose. Even when individuals subordinate themselves and risk death in a common cause, their genes are more likely to be transmitted to the next generation than are those of competing groups who lack comparable resolve.

The mathematical models of population genetics suggest the following rule in the evolutionary origin of such altruism: If the reduction in survival and reproduction of individuals owing to genes for altruism is more than offset by the increased probability of survival of the group owing to the altruism, then altruism genes will rise in frequency throughout the entire population of competing groups. To put it as concisely as possible: the individual pays, his genes and tribe gain, altruism spreads.

## Ethics and Animal Life

LET me now suggest a still deeper significance of the empiricist theory of the origin of ethics and religion. If empiricism were disproved, and transcendentalism compellingly upheld, the discovery would be quite simply the most consequential in human history. That is the burden laid upon biology as it draws close to the humanities.

The matter is still far from resolved. But empiricism, as I have argued, is well supported thus far in the case of ethics. The objective evidence for or against it in religion is weaker, but at least still consistent with biology. For example, the emotions that accompany religious ecstasy clearly have a neurobiological source. At least one form of brain disorder is associated with hyperreligiosity, in which cosmic significance is given to almost everything, including trivial everyday events. One can imagine the biological construction of a mind with religious beliefs, although that alone would not disprove the logic of transcendentalism, or prove the beliefs themselves to be untrue.

Equally important, much if not all religious behavior could have arisen from evolution by natural selection. The theory fits—crudely. The behavior includes at least some aspects of belief in gods. Propitiation and sacrifice, which are near-universals of religious practice, are acts of submis-



sion to a dominant being. They reflect one kind of dominance hierarchy, which is a general trait of organized mammalian societies. Like human beings, animals use elaborate signals to advertise and maintain their rank in the hierarchy. The details vary among species but also have consistent similarities across the board, as the following two examples will illustrate.

In packs of wolves the dominant animal walks erect and “proud,” stiff-legged and deliberate, with head, tail, and ears up, and stares freely and casually at others. In the presence of rivals the dominant animal bristles its pelt while

curling its lips to show teeth, and it takes first choice in food and space. A subordinate uses opposite signals. It turns away from the dominant individual while lowering its head, ears, and tail, and it keeps its fur sleek and its teeth covered. It grovels and slinks, and yields food and space when challenged.

In a troop of rhesus monkeys the alpha male is remarkably similar in mannerisms to a dominant wolf. He keeps his head and tail up, and walks in a deliberate, “regal” manner while casually staring at others. He climbs objects to maintain height above his rivals. When challenged he





stares hard at the opponent with mouth open—signaling aggression, not surprise—and sometimes slaps the ground with open palms to signal his readiness to attack. The male or female subordinate affects a furtive walk, holding its head and tail down, turning away from the alpha and other higher-ranked individuals. It keeps its mouth shut except for a fear grimace, and when challenged makes a cringing retreat. It yields space and food and, in the case of males, estrous females.

My point is this: Behavioral scientists from another planet would notice immediately the parallels between animal

dominance behavior on the one hand and human obeisance to religious and civil authority on the other. They would point out that the most elaborate rites of obeisance are directed at the gods, the hyperdominant if invisible members of the human group. And they would conclude, correctly, that in baseline social behavior, not just in anatomy, *Homo sapiens* has only recently diverged in evolution from a nonhuman primate stock.

Countless studies of animal species, whose instinctive behavior is unobscured by cultural elaboration, have shown that membership in dominance orders pays off in survival and lifetime reproductive success. That is true not just for the dominant individuals but for the subordinates as well. Membership in either class gives animals better protection against enemies and better access to food, shelter, and mates than does solitary existence. Furthermore, subordination in the group is not necessarily permanent. Dominant individuals weaken and die, and as a result some of the underlings advance in rank and appropriate more resources.

Modern human beings are unlikely to have erased the old mammalian genetic programs and devised other means of distributing power. All the evidence suggests that they have not. True to their primate heritage, people are easily seduced by confident, charismatic leaders, especially males. That predisposition is strong in religious organizations. Cults form around such leaders. Their power grows if they can persuasively claim special access to the supremely dominant, typically male figure of God. As cults evolve into religions, the image of the Supreme Being is reinforced by myth and liturgy. In time the authority of the founders and their successors is graven in sacred texts. Unruly subordinates, known as “blasphemers,” are squashed.

The symbol-forming human mind, however, never remains satisfied with raw, apish feeling in any emotional realm. It strives to build cultures that are maximally rewarding in every dimension. Ritual and prayer permit religious believers to be in direct touch with the Supreme Being; consolation from coreligionists softens otherwise unbearable grief; the unexplainable is explained; and an oceanic sense of communion with the larger whole is made possible.

Communion is the key, and hope rising from it is eternal; out of the dark night of the soul arises the prospect of a spiritual journey to the light. For a special few the journey can be taken in this life. The mind reflects in certain ways in order to reach ever higher levels of enlightenment, until finally, when no further progress is possible, it enters a mystical union with the whole. Within the great religions such enlightenment is expressed by Hindu samadhi, Buddhist Zen satori, Sufi fana, and Pentecostal Christian rebirth. Something like it is also experienced by hallucinating preliterate shamans. What all these celebrants evidently feel (as I felt once, to some degree, as a reborn evangelical) is hard to put in words, but Willa Cather came as close as possible in a single sentence. In *My*

Antonia her fictional narrator says, "That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great."

Of course that is happiness—to find the godhead, or to enter the wholeness of nature, or otherwise to grasp and hold on to something ineffable, beautiful, and eternal. Millions seek it. They feel otherwise lost, adrift in a life without ultimate meaning. They enter established religions, succumb to cults, dabble in New Age nostrums. They push *The Celestine Prophecy* and other junk attempts at enlightenment onto the best-seller lists.

Perhaps, as I believe, these phenomena can all eventually be explained as functions of brain circuitry and deep genetic history. But this is not a subject that even the most hardened empiricist should presume to trivialize. The idea of mystical union is an authentic part of the human spirit. It has occupied humanity for millennia, and it raises questions of utmost seriousness for transcendentalists and scientists alike. What road, we ask, was traveled, what destination reached, by the mystics of history?

### Theology Moves Toward Abstraction

**F**OR many, the urge to believe in transcendental existence and immortality is overpowering. Transcendentalism, especially when reinforced by religious faith, is psychically full and rich; it feels somehow *right*. By comparison, empiricism seems sterile and inadequate. In the quest for ultimate meaning the transcendentalist route is much easier to follow. That is why, even as empiricism is winning the mind, transcendentalism continues to win the heart. Science has always defeated religious dogma point by point when differences between the two were meticulously assessed. But to no avail. In the United States 16 million people belong to the Southern Baptist denomination, the largest favoring a literal interpretation of the Christian Bible, but the American Humanist Association, the leading organization devoted to secular and deistic humanism, has only 5,000 members.

Still, if history and science have taught us anything, it is that passion and desire are not the same as truth. The human mind evolved to believe in gods. It did not evolve to believe in biology. Acceptance of the supernatural conveyed a great advantage throughout prehistory, when the brain was evolving. Thus it is in sharp contrast to the science of biology, which was developed as a product of the modern age and is not underwritten by genetic algorithms. The uncomfortable truth is that the two beliefs are not factually compatible. As a result, those who hunger for both intellectual and religious truth face disquieting choices.

Meanwhile, theology tries to resolve the dilemma by evolving, sciencelike, toward abstraction. The gods of our ancestors were divine human beings. The Egyptians represented

them as Egyptian (often with body parts of Nilotic animals), and the Greeks represented them as Greek. The great contribution of the Hebrews was to combine the entire pantheon into a single person, Yahweh (a patriarch appropriate to desert tribes), and to intellectualize his existence. No graven images were allowed. In the process, they rendered the divine presence less tangible. And so in biblical accounts it came to pass that no one, not even Moses approaching Yahweh in the burning bush, could look upon his face. In time the Jews were prohibited from even pronouncing his true full name. Nevertheless, the idea of a theistic God, omniscient, omnipotent, and closely involved in human affairs, has persisted to this day as the dominant religious image of Western culture.

During the Enlightenment a growing number of liberal Judeo-Christian theologians, wishing to accommodate theism to a more rationalist view of the material world, moved away from God as a literal person. Baruch Spinoza, the pre-eminent Jewish philosopher of the seventeenth century, visualized the deity as a transcendent substance present everywhere in the universe. *Deus sive natura*, "God or nature," he declared, they are interchangeable. For his philosophical pains he was banished from his synagogue under a comprehensive anathema, combining all the curses in the book. The risk of heresy notwithstanding, the depersonalization of God has continued steadily into the modern era. For Paul Tillich, one of the most influential Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, the assertion of the existence of God-as-person is not false; it is just meaningless. Among many of the most liberal contemporary thinkers the denial of a concrete divinity takes the form of "process theology." Everything in this most extreme of ontologies is part of a seamless and endlessly complex web of unfolding relationships. God is manifest in everything.

Scientists, the roving scouts of the empiricist movement, are not immune to the idea of God. Those who favor it often lean toward some form of process theology. They ask this question: When the real world of space, time, and matter is well enough known, will that knowledge reveal the Creator's presence? Their hopes are vested in the theoretical physicists who pursue the final theory, the Theory of Everything, T.O.E., a system of interlocking equations that describe all that can be learned of the forces of the physical universe. T.O.E. is a "beautiful" theory, as Steven Weinberg has called it in his important book *Dreams of a Final Theory*—beautiful because it will be elegant, expressing the possibility of unending complexity with minimal laws; and symmetrical, because it will hold invariant through all space and time; and inevitable, meaning that once it is stated, no part can be changed without invalidating the whole. All surviving sub-theories can be fitted into it permanently, in the manner described by Einstein in his own contribution, the General Theory of Relativity. "The chief attraction of the theory," Ein-



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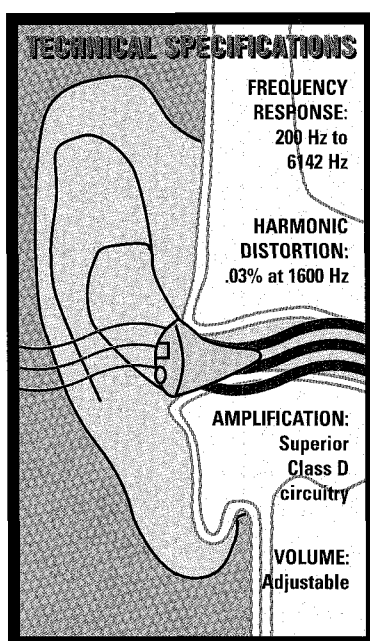
by Harold Sturman

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stein said, "lies in its logical completeness. If a single one of the conclusions drawn from it proves wrong, it must be given up; to modify it without destroying the whole structure seems to be impossible."

The prospect of a final theory by the most mathematical of scientists might seem to signal the approach of a new religious awakening. Stephen Hawking, yielding to the temptation in *A Brief History of Time* (1988), declared that this scientific achievement "would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would know the mind of God."

### A Hunger for Spirituality

**T**HE essence of humanity's spiritual dilemma is that we evolved genetically to accept one truth and discovered another. Can we find a way to erase the dilemma, to resolve the contradictions between the transcendentalist and empiricist world views?

Unfortunately, in my view, the answer is no. Furthermore, the choice between the two is unlikely to remain arbitrary forever. The assumptions underlying these world views are being tested with increasing severity by cumulative verifiable knowledge about how the universe works, from atom to brain to galaxy. In addition, the harsh lessons of history have taught us that one code of ethics is not always as good—or at least not as durable—as another. The same is true of religions. Some cosmologies are factually less correct than others, and some ethical precepts are less workable.

Human nature is biologically based, and it is relevant to ethics and religion. The evidence shows that because of its influence, people can readily be educated to only a narrow range of ethical precepts. They flourish within certain belief systems and wither in others. We need to know exactly why.

To that end I will be so presumptuous as to suggest how the conflict between the world views will most likely be settled. The idea of a genetic, evolutionary origin of moral and religious beliefs will continue to be tested by biological studies of complex human behavior. To the extent that the sensory and nervous systems appear to have evolved by natural selection, or at least some other purely material process, the empiricist interpretation will be supported. It will be further supported by verification of gene-culture coevolution, the essential process postulated by scientists to underlie human nature by linking changes in genes to changes in culture.

Now consider the alternative. To the extent that ethical and religious phenomena do *not* appear to have evolved in a manner congenial to biology, and especially to the extent that such complex behavior cannot be linked to physical events in the sensory and nervous systems, the empiricist position will have to be abandoned and a transcendentalist explanation accepted.

For centuries the writ of empiricism has been spreading into the ancient domain of transcendentalist belief, slowly at

the start but quickening in the scientific age. The spirits our ancestors knew intimately fled first the rocks and trees and then the distant mountains. Now they are in the stars, where their final extinction is possible. *But we cannot live without them.* People need a sacred narrative. They must have a sense of larger purpose, in one form or another, however intellectualized. They will refuse to yield to the despair of animal mortality. They will continue to plead, in company with the psalmist, *Now Lord, what is my comfort?* They will find a way to keep the ancestral spirits alive.

If the sacred narrative cannot be in the form of a religious cosmology, it will be taken from the material history of the universe and the human species. That trend is in no way debasing. The true evolutionary epic, retold as poetry, is as intrinsically ennobling as any religious epic. Material reality discovered by science already possesses more content and grandeur than all religious cosmologies combined. The continuity of the human line has been traced through a period of deep history a thousand times as old as that conceived by the Western religions. Its study has brought new revelations of great moral importance. It has made us realize that *Homo sapiens* is far more than an assortment of tribes and races. We are a single gene pool from which individuals are drawn in each generation and into which they are dissolved the next generation, forever united as a species by heritage and a common future. Such are the conceptions, based on fact, from which new intimations of immortality can be drawn and a new mythos evolved.

Which world view prevails, religious transcendentalism or scientific empiricism, will make a great difference in the way humanity claims the future. While the matter is under advisement, an accommodation can be reached if the following overriding facts are realized. Ethics and religion are still too complex for present-day science to explain in depth. They are, however, far more a product of autonomous evolution than has hitherto been conceded by most theologians. Science faces in ethics and religion its most interesting and possibly most humbling challenge, while religion must somehow find the way to incorporate the discoveries of science in order to retain credibility. Religion will possess strength to the extent that it codifies and puts into enduring, poetic form the highest values of humanity consistent with empirical knowledge. That is the only way to provide compelling moral leadership. Blind faith, no matter how passionately expressed, will not suffice. Science, for its part, will test relentlessly every assumption about the human condition and in time uncover the bedrock of moral and religious sentiments.

The eventual result of the competition between the two world views, I believe, will be the secularization of the human epic and of religion itself. However the process plays out, it demands open discussion and unwavering intellectual rigor in an atmosphere of mutual respect. ☸



# The New Yorker's

## Mr. Shawn

by VED MEHTA

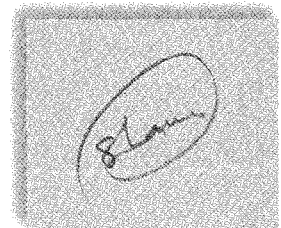
Introduction by IAN FRAZIER

*The mystery of William Shawn's origins—a source of considerable curiosity in the literary world throughout Shawn's long career—is finally solved by one of his writers*

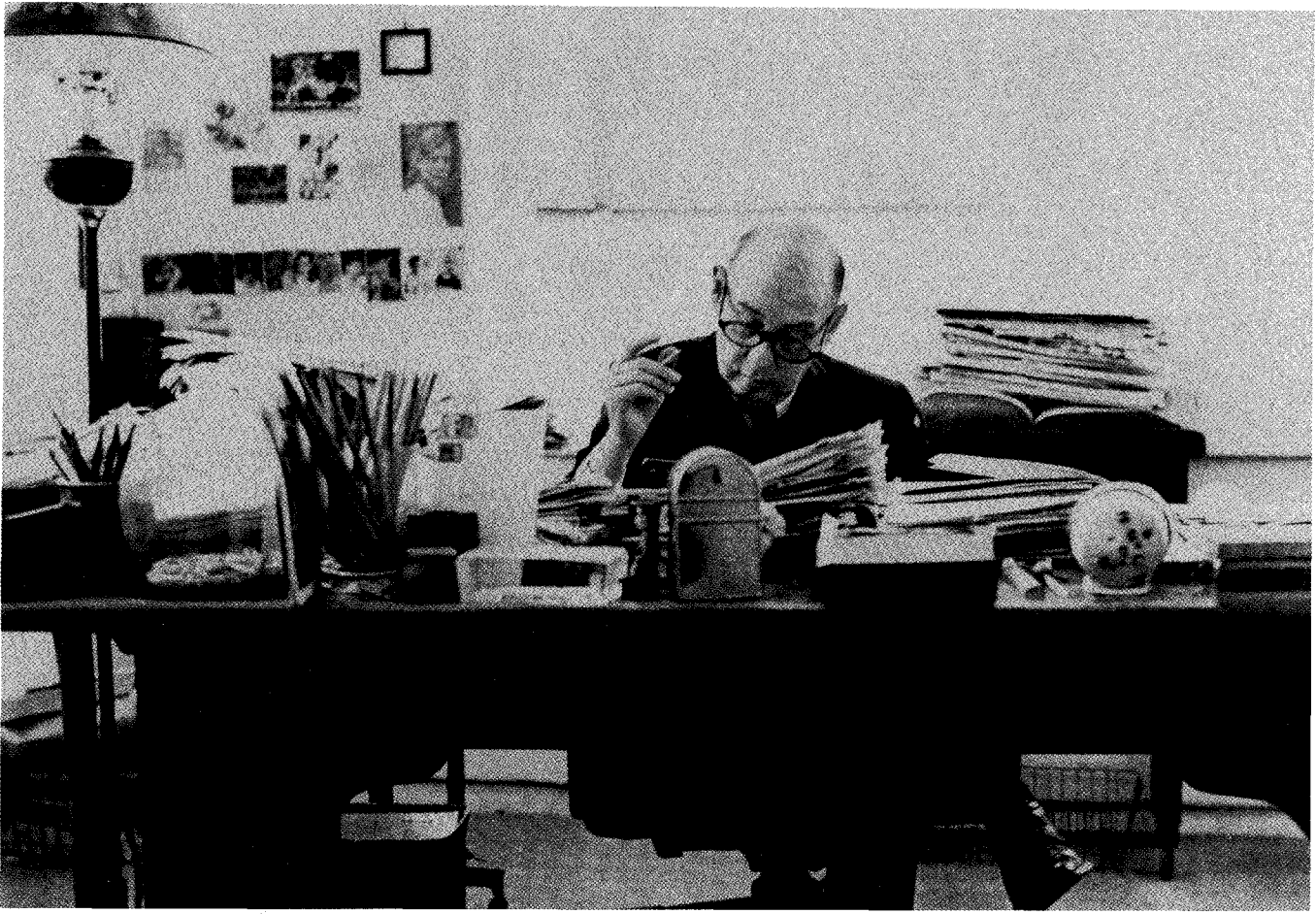
**W**ILLIAM Shawn worked at *The New Yorker* magazine for fifty-four years. He began there in 1933, became the editor in 1952, and left in 1987, when a company that had bought the magazine forced him to resign. His tenure as editor coincided, roughly, with the years of the Cold War. It is safe to say that he was the pre-eminent magazine editor in the world during that time. Among his gifts was a faultless ear for Cold War-era apocalyptic, audible in the titles of famous works he edited, such as *Hiroshima* and *Silent Spring* and *The Fate of the Earth* and *The Fire Next Time*. Mostly, though, his tastes in writing were hard to categorize. He published the stories and novels of J. D. Salinger, and Truman Capote's true-crime classic, *In Cold Blood*, and movie reviews by Pauline Kael that changed not just movie reviewing but reviewing in general. And E. B. White and Hannah Arendt and Edmund Wilson and Milan Kundera and Elizabeth Bishop, Joseph Brodsky and Harold Brodkey and Donald Barthelme and Janet Flanner and S. J. Perelman, George Steiner and Peter Handke and Philip Roth and Jamaica Kincaid and John McPhee and Joseph Mitchell—the list of distinguished writers he published could go on and on. He loved new writing, read quickly, and almost always knew what to do to a piece to make it better. Often his editing amounted to an inspired sort of doing nothing, of just letting a piece run.

Harold Ross, *The New Yorker's* founder and first editor, always referred to himself simply as “Ross,” and so did everybody else. Perhaps following that tradition, his successor called himself and signed himself “Shawn.” A contributor might pick up his telephone and hear the small voice at the other end say, “Shawn here.” But the contributor always replied, “Hello, Mr. Shawn.” The honorific “Mr.” seems to have been awarded him by popular acclaim among his colleagues out of respect, and in deference to his own politeness. He was a shy, formal man, and he took self-effacement so far that he met megalomania coming back the other way. He seldom talked about himself—people who worked with him for decades knew little more of his biography than the few facts anyone could read about him in *Who's Who*. He gave almost no interviews, and almost never let himself be photographed. No record that he ever made a speech in public can be found. Harold Ross sometimes gave away studio head shots of himself on which he had scrawled personalized epigrams. Shawn would not have done that in a million years. His style was a pervasive anonymity, and negative capability in the extreme.

Probably he would have preferred that nobody write anything about him after he was gone. Probably, but not certainly—he lived surrounded by rules, but kept a wary eye on them, and recklessly broke them himself once in a while if he felt the urge. In the article that follows, Ved Mehta, who was a staff writer at *The New Yorker* for thirty-three years, describes the romantically American background from which Shawn came. — I. F.



*Shawn's signature  
on a galley proof*



**T**HE composer Allen Shawn, the younger of William Shawn's two sons, says that not once did his father initiate talk about his own family, let alone tell stories about his parents and siblings. He answered only direct questions about them, and then in the briefest possible way, so Allen surmised that his father might not have known much about them himself, since he had been the youngest child and there had been a long span between him and the oldest child, Harold. Or he might have had very complicated feelings about his family. For instance, there was the matter of its name. His brother Nelson had changed his surname from Chon, which he thought sounded Chinese, to Shawn, possibly because he was a songwriter and he believed that Chinese composers had no prospects. None of the other siblings followed his example except the youngest. Allen imagines that this was not an act of rebellion against the family but, rather, an emphatic act of separation. However, as if to compound the mystery, Mr. Shawn's other son, Wallace, the playwright and actor, recalls distinctly that his father's father told him that the family name had originally been Silberwasser.

It may be that the reason Mr. Shawn didn't talk about his family was that he naturally avoided the limelight. He en-

joyed the fact that all his professional work was done behind the scenes and remained anonymous. Indeed, if there hadn't been a law requiring the name of the editor to be published once a year in the magazine, his name would never have appeared in *The New Yorker*, and that would have pleased him.

Anyway, by temperament he never dwelt on the past or talked about Chicago, where he was born and reared. Nostalgia was totally alien to him. I never heard him talk about the old days at *The New Yorker*, or about any writers who had died, even when he had edited them for many years, and he didn't say much even about Harold Ross. Over the years I heard it said during gatherings at the Shawn apartment that Mr. Shawn's father had grown up in Toronto, or perhaps in upstate New York. This inconsistency struck me as odd, since conversation in the Shawn household was always clear and accurate. There were other areas of mystery about his father: now and again it was casually said that he had run away from home as a boy and had made his own way in the world, but why he had run away was never discussed. It was also said that he had some acting talent. Once, Allen told me that his grandfather used to sell knives, and that there was a picture

*Shawn at The New Yorker's West 43rd Street office, 1977*



somewhere in the apartment that showed him doing just that. Then I heard that the woman he married was named Anna, often known as Annie, and that her family had lived in England at a certain point. From what I could gather, she was born in Manchester, but her family name, Bransky, strongly suggested that her family had originally come from Eastern Europe. At some point the Branskys had settled in Detroit. I remember Mr. Shawn's saying to a group in his living room that he had a picture of Anna's parents and that they were extraordinary-looking, but in what way I never found out. Apparently, Anna's brother Sam Bransky had acting talent, like Mr. Shawn's father, and played tough-guy parts in silent films, but, again, I never knew which films or whether he was a walk-on or a major character.

I used to hear from Wallace and Allen that their grandparents on their father's side were Poles from the Russian empire. Allen felt that somewhere along the way the family had distorted its true origins. He certainly thought that his mother was vague about her background. I asked him why she might have had reason to be, and he said that his mother's mother had perhaps had an extremely painful life, and that his mother had been misled about it or else had decided not to talk about it. "If my mother's mother was Russian, as I believe she was, she may have left her home under very traumatic circumstances," Allen said. "After all, the period in which her family seems to have emigrated was during the pogroms. There's some question of where my mother's mother was born—in Russia or in Sweden." Mrs. Shawn's maiden name, Lyon, bears no trace of her family's Eastern European origins, if those existed.

There were other points of confusion. I heard sometimes that Mr. Shawn's father was the owner of a jewelry shop and at other times that he was also a jewelry designer. It was said that the jewelry shop had caught fire, and that afterward Harold, who had been reluctantly working for his father, became a life-insurance salesman. And so on.

Mr. Shawn's father was apparently no better than Mr. Shawn himself at clearing up confusion. Wallace says that as a boy, he once tried to draw his grandfather out, because he wanted to write a little family history. But his grandfather, instead of answering any of his questions, merely made jokes about his project.

The mystery, the secrecy, the confusion—whatever it was—only succeeded in stimulating my curiosity.

**O**NCE, in 1972, when Mr. Shawn was editing my biographical portrait of my father, he looked up and said, "Your father reminds me very much of mine."

"In what way?" I asked. Since my father was a doctor and a public-health official in British India, a quintessential clubman, and an inveterate tennis, bridge, and poker player, it was hard for me to imagine how Mr. Shawn's father could have been like him. Still, my pulse quickened in antici-

pation of having some of my questions about the Chon family answered.

"In so many ways," he said, putting down his pencil. "Like your father, my father started out with nothing and made a wonderful life. Like your father, he came from a large family and had a large family of his own. He was also very worldly, and could get on with practically everybody."

He didn't go on. He picked up his pencil, and we returned to working on the proofs.

Some years later, when Ivan Morris, a noted scholar of Japanese, who was a close friend of mine, died and I was asked to speak at his memorial service, I remembered that his family had had some connection with Chicago, and inquired of Mr. Shawn if he'd ever come across them. He said that Morris's grandfather Nels Morris had been a very important figure in the meat-packing industry, and when I pressed him for more information, he directed me to an obscure book, by an observer of the American food industry named Bertram Fowler, that was titled *Men, Meat and Miracles* and had been published in 1952. In it, along with a story about Ivan's grandfather, was an account of a knife vendor in the Chicago stockyards who was known to everyone as Jackknife Ben. His surname was Chon, and I asked Mr. Shawn if Jackknife Ben was any relation. "He was my father," he said simply. The revelation was astounding: the father in the book and the son I knew seemed so different.

Fowler led off his book with the story of Jackknife Ben—actually, made him stand for Chicago and, by extension, for American enterprise and industry taking shape there in the nineteenth century. Indeed, according to Fowler, the jackknife might have been the first of many gadgets that, as they proliferated, became the hallmark of American mass consumer society.

Ben, a small, wiry, tireless man, who was born in Canada in 1863, had, as Fowler put it, the industriousness of an ant and the irrepressible cheerfulness of a cricket. When he was only thirteen, he left his home to make his living, in the manner of many boys of the period. He belonged to an age of ferment, when men were driven by wild, exuberant dreams of starting with nothing and

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**Chicago's Union Stockyards sprawled over 475 acres. Here Benjamin W. Chon set up shop, selling jackknives and then jewelry. A natural pitchman, he prospered**

DAVID R. PHILLIPS COLLECTION



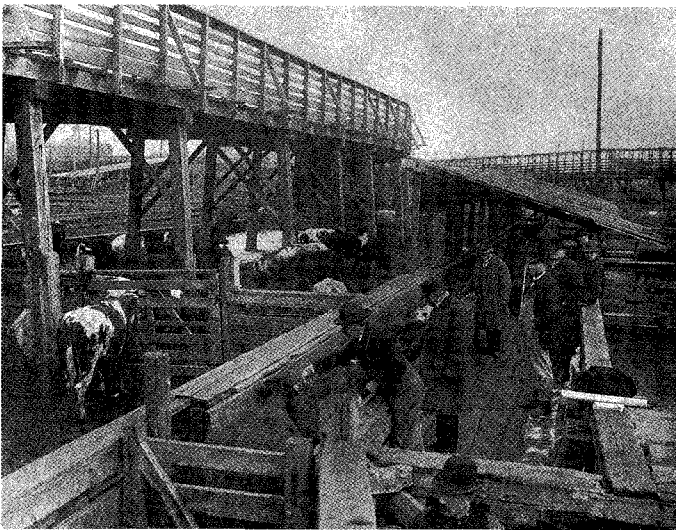
ceaselessly traveling and hawking his wares. Then he met Anna, and wanted to marry her and settle down by his own fire-side. In 1889 he went to Chicago and happened to visit the stockyards. He saw there the whole West converging from the far-flung ranches and ranges of Texas, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. "I took one look

at the yards and knew that my travels were over," he later recalled. "Why should I chase from county fair to county fair all over the country when every day was county fair at the yards?"

Ben thereupon upended a barrel in front of the old railroad depot on Exchange Avenue and spread out his jackknives. Every night he stored the barrel and the knives in the hallway of the office of the *Drover's Journal*, and every morning, while it was still dark, he retrieved them and set up his stand amid the seething noise and tumult of the stockyards, dimly lit by bobbing lanterns. He never missed a day, no matter how fierce the wind or how bad the snowstorm. Within a year he had found a niche inside the depot and opened a booth equipped with one electric light and a small radiator, and married Anna.

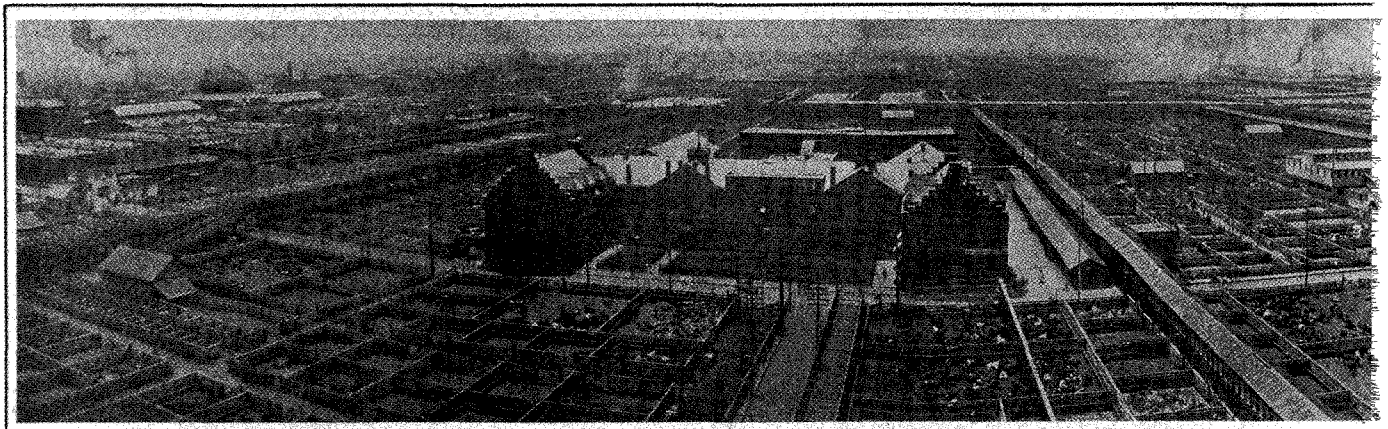
A drover bringing cattle, hogs, or sheep to the stockyards for sale apparently couldn't go by Ben's booth without buying a knife. In those days of simple living the jackknife was one tool that all men carried. "A man without a jackknife in that age was no man at all," Fowler wrote. No matter how many jackknives a man owned, he could always do with one more, and there were always new and better jackknives coming along. Ben imported the best knives from Germany and stamped them "Jackknife Ben," two words that became both his name and his trademark.

CULVER PICTURES



getting rich. By the time Ben was sixteen, he was the proud owner of a horse and carriage, and used it to peddle tinware from farm to farm in Canada. Then the tinware business began to flag, and he looked southward to the United States. Having emigrated, he peddled jackknives in various cow towns, often making his pitch on a Saturday night on the main street, or on any other occasion that brought people together in a holiday mood. He was a natural pitchman, and was easy to get along with. He spent the next ten years

CULVER PICTURES





The meat-packing industry was different from all other industries. It had an aspect of show, like a fair or an auction. Since it had to contend with such imponderables as drought, flood, and disease, it could not have rigid production schedules. Other industries, mining among them, were also changing the face of America, with jerry-built camps and saloons and bagnios, but the meat-packing industry, for all its brutal methods, seems to have had, according to Fowler, a certain wholesomeness about it. People involved in it—drovers, slaughterers, meat-packers, and their agents—were rugged individualists. Many of them were moral men, whose attitude toward life had been forged in the solitude of the prairies and the plains, where they lived amid buffalo grass and tall cornstalks. They sealed their bargains with a spoken word. A packer's agent, for instance, would look at an animal and call, "Weigh 'em out," making no note of the sale. He carried all the sales in his head until the end of the day, and then made his report to his boss. It was boasted in the stockyards that no packer had ever gone back on his word and that no drover had ever failed to get his agreed price.

Jackknife Ben, for his part, having built up a formidable reputation, opened a shop called Benjamin W. Chon, and branched out from selling knives into selling diamond necklaces and rings. A drover often picked out a necklace or a ring for his wife and took it on approval. If she liked it, Ben

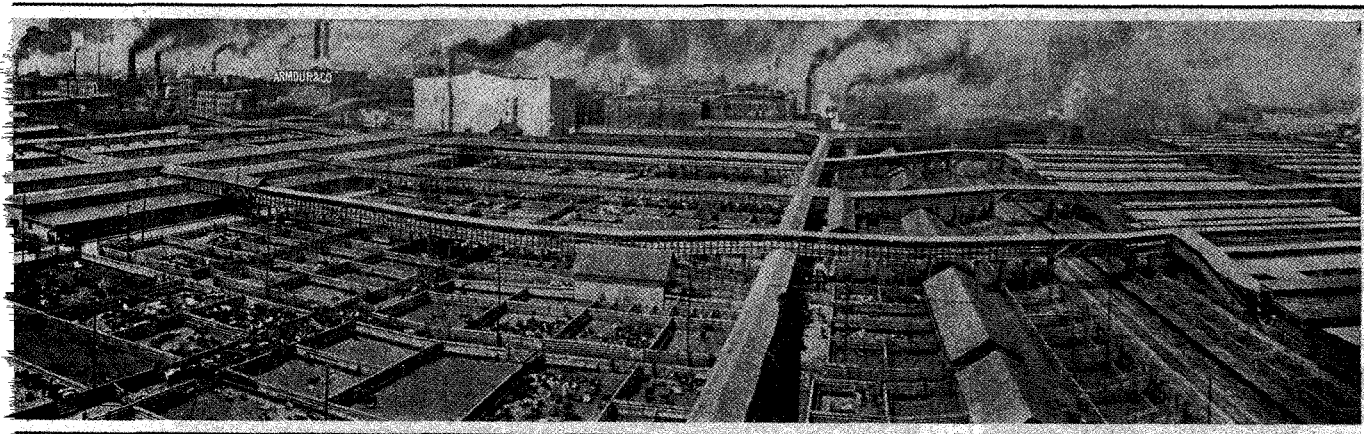
**A certain knife vendor in the Chicago stockyards was known to everyone as Jackknife Ben. His surname was Chon, and I asked if he was any relation. "He was my father," Shawn said simply. The revelation was astounding.**

got a check for it at his shop; if she didn't, the drover returned it the next time he came to Chicago.

Jackknife Ben prospered as the city and its meat-packing industry grew and developed under men like Gus Swift, P. D. Armour, Tom Wilson, and Nels Morris, and their names became associated with the great meat-packing houses. He—and they—were in the tradition of pioneers like Long John Wentworth, who came to Chicago barefoot and eventually became its mayor. There was something gargantuan and mighty in the spirit of these pioneers, which enabled them to take huge risks and garner huge returns.

After reading about Jackknife Ben, I often wondered about possible connections between father and son. Could it be that Mr. Shawn's deep aversion to blood and gore (he could scarcely bear to hear about a surgical operation), his bundling up against the cold, his staying close to his home and office, his hatred of any kind of commercialism, and his quietness were all, in one way or another, negative reactions to his father's life? I couldn't think of anyone less likely to carry a pocketknife than he; instead, he always had on him a silver mechanical pencil. And I wondered if his almost total reliance on verbal agreements, his taking huge risks with writers and artists, his editing an article or looking at a drawing as if it were a piece of filigreed jewelry, his interest in people, his contentment with minimal comforts, and his total lack of self-importance were positive consequences of his father's early peripatetic life and later stockyard ethics. Such comparisons between the two men might be farfetched, but were they any more so than those between the lives of fathers and sons generally? Then again, such facts were no more relevant to explaining him than were the facts of a poet's life to explaining his poetry.

**M**EN, *Meat and Miracles* only whetted my appetite for Chon lore, and some time after Mr. Shawn died, in 1992, at the age of eighty-five, I tried to draw out Wallace and Mrs. Shawn—or Cecille, as I had been calling her for many years by then—about the family background. They were both evasive in their responses. I sought to impress



upon them that since Mr. Shawn was a substantial figure in the history of letters, there was no way he could be kept out of the public eye. Wallace then said that he didn't have much information but would meet me for lunch one day and pass on what he did have.

A vast number of people now know Wallace Shawn as a comic actor in a variety of films. A smaller number, who have seen him in *My Dinner With André* or *Vanya on 42nd Street*, know him as a remarkable serious actor, too. A very small number know him as a writer of plays, most of them containing explicit sexual—and, more recently, political—material. He has a cult following, and is as famous as his father was anonymous. On the other hand, Allen, who is married to the flamboyant West Indian-born writer Jamaica Kincaid, has always been somewhat retiring, and in this way he seems more like Mr. Shawn than Wallace does. As Wallace and I walked down the street to an Italian restaurant in my neighborhood, people recognized him.

At lunch, as always, Wallace's manner was punctilious and his expression a little roguish. There is a general rounded quality about his face and his hands that makes him come across as almost cuddly, and he is short and sturdy, yet he seems taller than he is. Even so, whenever I am with him, I am reminded again and again of Mr. Shawn. Wallace has a touch of his father's magnetism.

"How old were you when Ben died?" I asked him.

"I was nine—he died in 1952."

"Do you remember him?"

**Shawn as baseball-team manager and basketball player (front row, left) at the Harvard School**



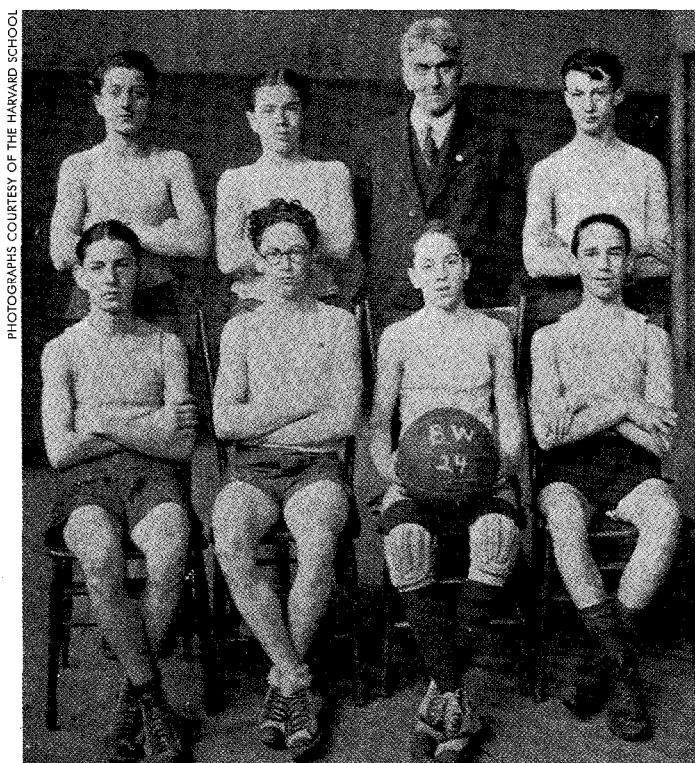
MANAGER CHON

"Of course. Back then, Father was not yet the editor, and we used to go to Chicago. I remember Ben as lean, a little rakish, and dynamic. In his pictures he looks sportive; one could almost imagine him in a boxing match or running a race. The basic impression I have is that having started with a junk wagon, he had become respectable and prosperous, and his children grew up in a house with a billiard room. I think they had a maid and, at least for some time, a car with a driver. Apparently, Ben was a little conservative about what his children should do in the world. For instance,

Harold had received a very good offer to become a comedian, a violinist, and an entertainer in a vaudeville show, but Ben ordered him to turn down the offer and come and work in his store. Harold exercised his talents for comedy and music by doing shows at his temple. Mike, the youngest brother except for my father, had a similarly lucrative offer—in his case, to play the saxophone in a band—and Ben made him turn that down too. So Mike, instead of being a professional jazz musician, went into advertising and wrote jingles. He co-wrote a very well known jingle for Wrigley's chewing gum, 'Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Fun,' and a version of it is still on television. It's generally shown with a motif of twins—twins rowing a boat, and the like. In those days people did what their fathers told them. Ben was pretty harsh when he was young, particularly with Harold, but he became increasingly mellow as he got older, so by the time Father's turn came, he was very permissive. Of all the children, Father was the only one who was allowed to really pursue an artistic vocation, although all the brothers had apparently wanted to do that."

"It's something of a puzzle to me that Mr. Shawn should have turned out to be so open to life, given his conservative background," I said.

"It's a miracle," Wallace said. "I remember poring over his yearbooks of the Harvard School for Boys, a private school in Chicago, where he went from at least the seventh grade on. Clearly, it was a very conservative school. The teachers looked very severe. They had steel-rimmed glasses. The discipline must have been very rigid. Father was one of the regular guys. He was a manager of a couple of sports teams, like the baseball team, and he himself, I think, also played some sports, and not badly. When I was at Dalton, he played in a father-and-son baseball game. Everyone remarked on how agile he was, even though in his literary life he didn't indulge



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE HARVARD SCHOOL



# Why We Need A Smaller U.S. Population And How We Can Achieve It

We need a smaller population in order to halt the destruction of our environment, and to create an economy that will be **sustainable** over the very long term.

We are trying to address our steadily worsening environmental problems without coming to grips with their root cause -- overpopulation.

**If present immigration and fertility rates continue, our population, now over 269 million, will pass 400 million by the year 2050 -- and still be growing rapidly!**

All efforts to save our environment will ultimately be futile unless we not only halt U.S. population growth, but reverse it, so that our population can eventually be stabilized at a **sustainable** level -- far lower than it is today.

## The Optimum U.S. Population Size

The central issue is surely this: **At what size should we seek to stabilize U.S. population?** Unless we know in what direction we should be headed, how can we possibly devise sensible policies to get us there?

The size at which our population is eventually stabilized is supremely important because of the effect of sheer numbers of people on such vitally important national goals as a healthy environment, and a sustainable economy.

We believe these goals can best be achieved with a U.S. population in the range of 125 to 150 million, or about its size in the 1940s. This optimum size could be reached in about three to four generations if we do two things now that are well within our grasp.

## How To Get There

1. **Halt illegal immigration and reduce annual legal immigration to not more than 100,000, including all relatives, refugees and asylees.** Then, immigration will no longer contribute significantly to our population growth, as it does now.
2. **Lower our fertility rate** (the average number of children per woman) from the present 2.1 to around 1.5 and maintain it at that level for several decades. We believe that non-coercive financial incentives will be necessary in order to reach that goal.

If almost all women had no more than two children, our fertility rate would drop to around 1.5, because many women remain childless by choice, or choose to have not more than one child. **We promote the ideal of the two-child maximum family as the social norm, because that is the key to lowering our fertility.**

## Incentives to Lower Fertility

NPG proposes these incentives to motivate parents to have no more than two children:

- Eliminate the present Federal income tax exemption for dependent children born after a specified date.
- Give a Federal income tax credit **only** to those parents who have not more than two children. Those with three or more would lose the credit entirely.
- Give an annual cash grant to parents who pay little or no income tax, and who have no more than two children. Those with three or more children would lose the cash grant entirely.

## Two Vastly Different Paths Lie Before Us

With the reductions in immigration and fertility we advocate, our nation could start **now** on the path toward a sustainable, and prosperous, population of 125 to 150 million.

Without such a program, we are almost certain to continue our mindless, headlong rush down our current path. That path is leading us straight toward catastrophic population levels that can only devastate our environment, and produce universal poverty in a crowded, polluted nation.

If you agree that we need to work toward a smaller U.S. population, we need your support. **NPG is the only organization that calls for a smaller U.S. and world population, and for specific, realistic measures to achieve those goals.**

*We are a nonprofit, national membership organization established in 1972. Contributions to NPG are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. To become a member, and receive our newsletter, plus all our current and future publications, please send us your check today.*

**YES!** I want to become a member of NPG, and help reduce U.S. immigration to a level compatible with our national interest. I am enclosing my check for annual membership dues.

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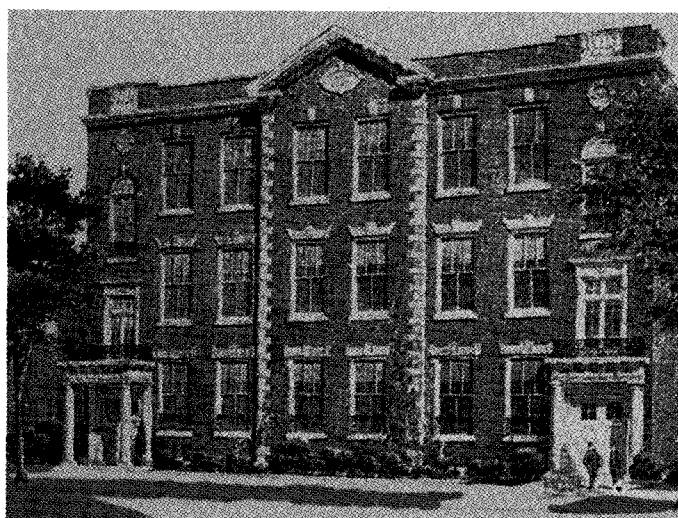
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**Negative Population Growth, Inc.**

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in any sporting activity, of course. He was in the tradition of a scholar who does absolutely nothing in the way of physical activity. It's a very Jewish thing, in fact, that the rabbi—the scholar—is waited on hand and foot."

"Yet I don't remember any Jewish element of any kind in your home," I said. "Your family observed Christmas and Easter. I remember your mother trimming the Christmas trees, and sewing little Easter bunnies to put in little baskets with grass and jelly beans. I don't remember so much as a mention of Hanukkah or Passover."

"There never was any—probably because Ben grew up in a period when Jews were absolutely bent on assimilating into America," Wallace said. "Their past in Europe was of suffering, which they were determined to forget. It seemed that the general feeling among the Jews of that period was that it was better to be anonymous, not to stand out. If you asked someone whose family had come from Russia about his background, all he would say would be 'It was cold there.' The idea was to be quiet about everything. It had to do with fear—fear that if you talked about things, you would stand out and might be killed."

"How did your father and grandfather get along?" I asked. "You must have seen them together."

"I don't remember ever seeing just the two of them

**Usually extremely accessible, Cecille Shawn was most reluctant to talk to me about anything to do with her husband or with their families' backgrounds. "I can imagine Bill up there counseling me to keep silent," she said.**

together," he said. "I generally saw them in large, noisy family groups. Chon family occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries tended to be simply enormous. They were held in hotels in Chicago, with fifty or a hundred relatives, and with many huge red roses, silver implements, and brothers and cousins doing skits for those assembled. Father was by far the quietest among them. He was singular in that way, because all our relatives were very lively, noisy, and theatrical. It was just understood that he was not expected to join in any skits. But they all treated him as beloved. They all admired and esteemed him as a special creature. They thought of him as a genius and also as very sweet and lovable."

"Do you remember Ben's wife, Anna?"

"Yes. Perhaps because I was small, she always struck me as big and peasantlike. She was somewhat heavysset, with gray hair. Her schooling probably hadn't gone beyond the third grade. She died when I was seven, a year and a half before Ben. I know that the date of her death, April 12th, made a great impression on Mother, because it was the sixth anniversary of President Roosevelt's death."

"Did you know your maternal grandmother?"

"Very well," he said. "She died in 1956, when I was thirteen. I remember she usually dressed in black, perhaps because she never stopped mourning for her husband, who died when Mother was three or four years old. Rose—that was her name—was a very striking woman. She had what people think of as a Jewish face—dark hair, a prominent nose. She wore her hair braided on top of her head, and I never knew how long it was until once when she came to visit us, and then I saw it extended to its full length. The braid reached almost to the floor. I couldn't believe it."

We talked on for some time, but Wallace wouldn't answer most of my questions, saying, with a mischievous laugh, that he was under specific instructions from his mother not to talk about certain things. He suggested that I tackle her myself, but warned me, "Don't probe too much into her background. She might get upset."

I said I would tread carefully.

**C**ECILLE has an almost unchanging youthful and sunny disposition, and she has maintained it even after the loss of Mr. Shawn. She tends to put a positive face on everything; that seems to be her way of surviving the trials of life. As a rule she is extremely accessible, but she was nevertheless most reluctant to talk to me about anything to do with her husband or with their families' backgrounds. "I can imagine Bill up there counseling me to keep silent," she said.

I said that by remaining silent she would encourage many of the misconceptions that had grown up about him to be accepted as truth.

She didn't seem to mind that, remarking sadly, "His memory has been completely erased."



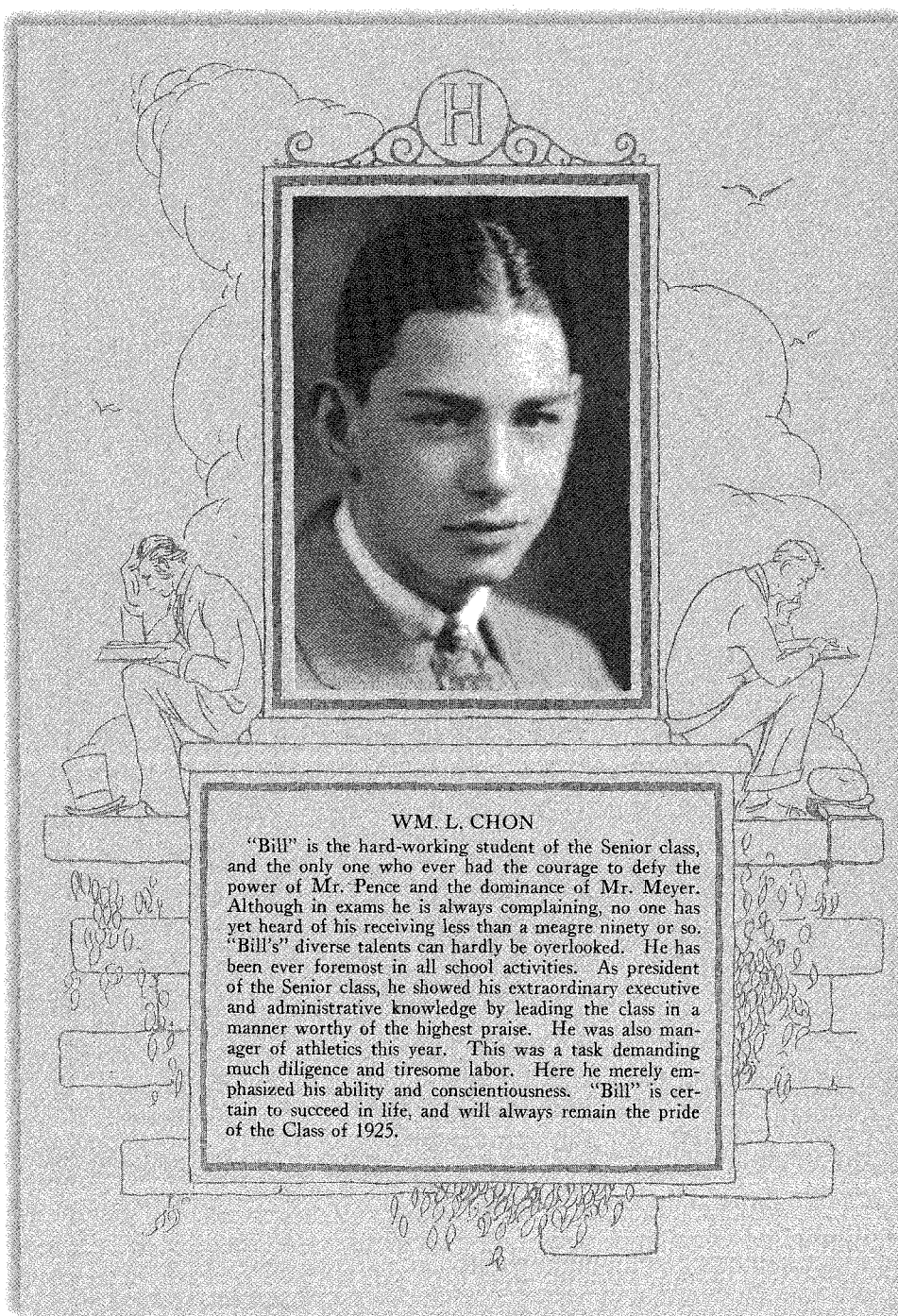
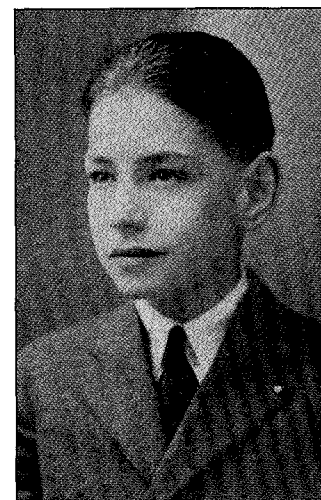
I told her that in the course of the twenty years or so that Mr. Shawn had edited the autobiographical pieces of my Continents of Exile series for *The New Yorker*, he and I had often discussed my writing one day about my years at the magazine. He had acknowledged that he was part of my story, and that there was no way I could avoid writing about him. He had agreed to help me—and, indeed, as she knew, in the last months of his life I had occasionally lunched with him and asked him questions.

"You should write only about your direct experience of him," Cecille said.

I said that that was what I was doing, but that there were many points about the family that I was confused about and needed to clarify.

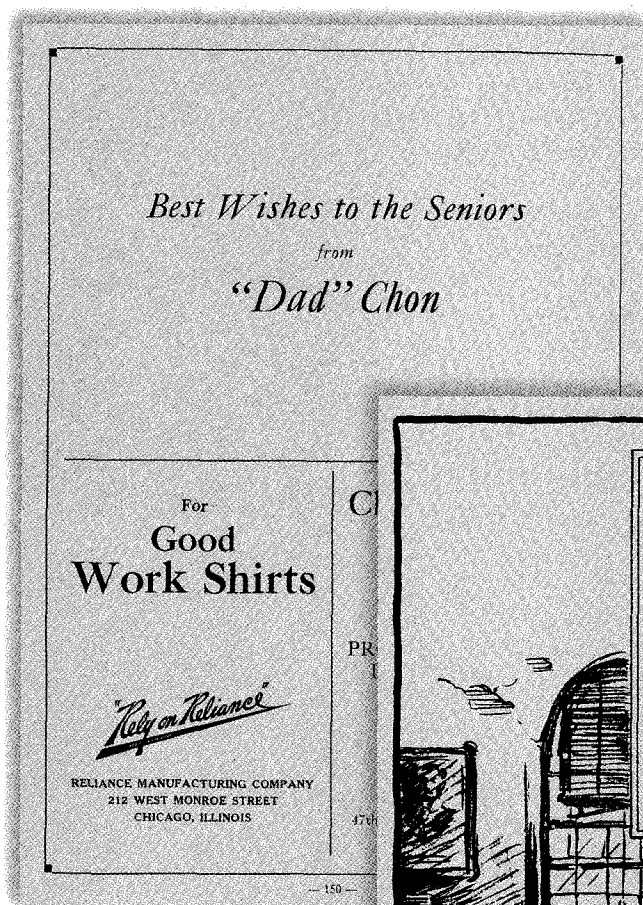
She suddenly dropped her guard and began to talk. "Bill's father—my father-in-law, Benjamin—was the oldest of seven children," she said. "He had one brother and five sisters—Dora, Bessie, Sadie, Sam, Birdie, and Rae. Aunt Sadie was the only one who did not marry. The rest of them were all married, with children. Harold, Benjamin's oldest son, who was born in 1891, was sixteen years older than Bill, and died at the age of seventy-five. Melba was two years younger than Harold. She married a barrister in Canada, and lived to be ninety-two. The third child was a boy who died very young. The fourth was Nelson, who was born in 1898 and died of angina at the age of forty-seven. Mike, the fifth child, was six years older than Bill. He was born in 1901, and, like Bill, died at the age of eighty-five. Mike and Bill, being the two youngest, were very close. They were both very sensitive, and Bill was much influenced by Mike. All the children had extraordinary personalities, and it was rather an eccentric family. None of the brothers quite fitted into the conventional world, but it was really Bill who expressed that

*The Harvard School (facing page) and Shawn's freshman picture (right), 1922. "President of the class," the yearbook noted. "He is also one of the class reporters." Below, Shawn the graduating senior*



PHOTOGRAPHS ON THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE COURTESY OF THE HARVARD SCHOOL





side of the family the most."

I asked her if the members of the family had resembled one another in looks.

"In some ways," she said. "Both Ben and Annie were what is called short. Ben had blue eyes. Annie was a little plump, and had brown eyes, beautiful skin, brown hair, and, like Bill, rosy cheeks. There was a most interesting set of colors in their family. Melba had fiery-red hair and blue eyes. She was more like her father than like her mother. Nelson and Bill had blue eyes and dark-brown hair. Harold had red hair and brown eyes, and so did Mike."

I asked her where in Chicago Mr. Shawn had grown up.

"When Bill was born—he was born at home—the family lived on Vincent Avenue. After that they moved to Ellis Avenue. The Chons had the whole first floor. You know, of course, about the home on Ellis Avenue where Bobby Franks, of the famous kidnapping case, lived. The Chons' house was a couple of doors away from the Frankses'. Jack Franks, Bobby's brother, was a very close friend of Bill's. They were at the Harvard School for Boys together, and, as a matter of fact, we went to Little Rock for Jack's wedding."

I asked what the Chon family's life in Chicago had been like.

"Nowadays everyone has a refrigerator; in those days

everyone had a piano in the house. All the children took piano lessons or played some musical instrument. Harold played the violin superbly. He would march around while he played, holding the violin on his head, resting it against different parts of his body, striking different physical attitudes. He was always interested in music and performing. During the First World War he directed the Navy orchestra at the Great Lakes Naval Station, in Chicago. Throughout his life he was a member

of veterans' groups. He visited veterans' hospitals and wrote musical shows for amateur entertainment. The other children were also very musical. Bill and Nelson played the piano, Mike played the sax, and Melba sang. Nelson was also a writer of popular songs. His songs were played a great deal in the big-band days by people like Glenn Miller, and later were sung by singers like Rosemary Clooney. One of his songs, 'Jim,' is still sometimes played on the radio."

"What was Mr. Shawn's upbringing like?"

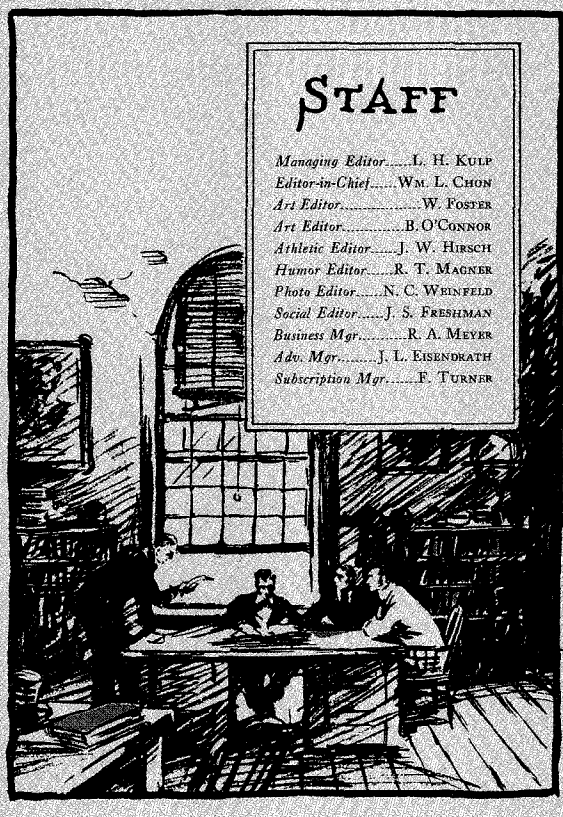
"Because Bill was the youngest, everybody protected him. In his early years he didn't see much of his father, who kept long hours at the shop, so he became very close to his mother. Even his phobias of heights, crowds, and close quarters came from her. Several of the other children also seemed to have inherited her phobias. Both Mike and Bill

#### *Pages from the Harvard School's 1925 yearbook, The Review*

had a phobia of flying, and that was one reason they didn't see anything of each other for the last ten years of Mike's life."

Cecille's mention of phobias reminded me of an awkward situation that my colleague Henry Cooper and I had once got into with respect to Mr. Shawn. Henry and I had suggested him to Yale for an honorary degree in 1980. He had never sought and never received any honors to speak of, and there was a groundswell of support for the idea from our colleagues, with one significant exception—E. B. White. He wrote to me,

As far as I'm concerned, Bill should be honored by every college in the land, for his great deeds and great character. Whether I want to put a bee in Yale's ear is another question—one that I have doubts about. Surely Yale is aware of the editor of the New Yorker and his contribution to American letters and the American scene. My ten-



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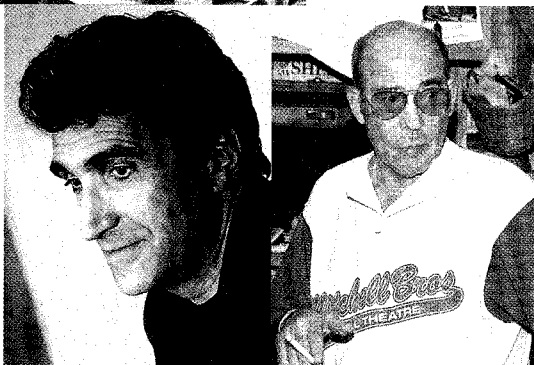
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dency in such a situation is to let Nature take its course, if only because to act in any other way might prove embarrassing to Bill, if he got wind of it.

In any event, I thank you for the suggestion, and, as the politicians say, I will vote my conscience.

When Mr. Shawn was offered the honorary degree, Henry and I wished that we had taken a cue from White. As with all such ceremonies, the honoree's presence was mandatory, but there was no way Mr. Shawn could tolerate being in a crowd, even for a ceremonial occasion. We had not given any thought to his phobia of crowds, because in the office he functioned like anyone else. And so the offer had put him in the terribly embarrassing position of having to decline a degree from a great university without being able to state the real reason. I had never mentioned my role in the whole wretched business to him, nor could I mention it now to Cecille.

She went on, "Because Bill was the baby of the family, and because he'd had scarlet fever when he was about sixteen, his mother was overprotective of him. Once, while he was at the Harvard School for Boys, she went to his teacher—or it may have been the principal—and said that Billy was working too hard. The instinct for everyone to protect him continued all his life. He was smothered with attention. Certainly everyone around the office had tender feelings for him. I remember that even my mother and my sister took his side against me if the two of us disagreed."

"How did you and Mr. Shawn meet?"

"I met Bill soon after *The New Yorker* was started, in February, 1925. He fell in love with *The New Yorker* and with me at the same time. We met through the evil designs of Bill's first cousin Marshall Berman. Bill was then in high school, and Marshall and I were both students at the University of Chicago. We had been peeking at each other in the Harper Li-

**"In Paris,"  
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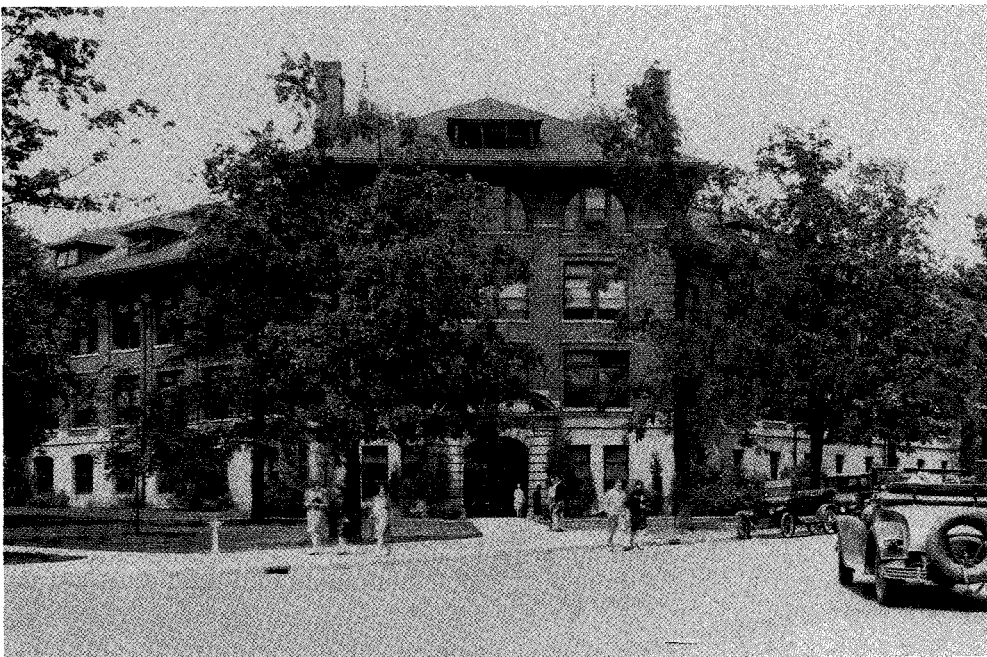
That was the style of dates. One would go for the evening to a hotel just to dance. There would be an orchestra, and maybe people would have a sandwich, along with ginger ale or something. Since it was cold, we couldn't have gone out onto the porch to dance, as one did in the summer, when all the doors were open. It was very romantic. Bill lied to me about his age. Although he was seventeen, he told me he

was eighteen. Since I was a little older, he was afraid I wouldn't take him seriously. I believed him, since he'd had to drop out of school for part of a term when he had scarlet fever. The evening we met, I simply thought he was a nice young man, but he went home and wrote in his diary that he'd met his future wife. We both went out with other people—he liked girls and had girlfriends—but we quickly became attached to each other."

"How did Mr. Shawn end up at the University of Michigan?"

"Mike had gone there. But

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unlike Mike, who enjoyed the university, played the saxophone, wrote the music for the class musical comedy, and graduated, Bill didn't take to the life there. He lived in a fraternity, and that life did not appeal to someone of his temperament. Early in his junior year, when he'd been at the university for a little over two years, his English professor recommended that he leave and go somewhere and write. He dropped out of the university and went to Las Vegas, New Mexico. He wrote some fiction and sent it out to various publications. It was not accepted. Bill was always very quick to decide that he didn't have this or that ability, so he decided that he couldn't make a living writing fiction, and instead went to work for the *Las Vegas Daily Optic*, doing regular reporting. He had to cover stabbings and make frequent visits to the police station. His activities were not yet limited by his phobias. One might say that in those days he was in a pre-phobic phase—he was apprehensive but not immobilized. Also, he must have been able to master his shyness or he couldn't have done his job. Even in his later life he got tense only when he was heading into a crowded room, and he was always able to conquer his shyness when it came to work or the office."

"When did you and Mr. Shawn get married?"

"Bill returned to Chicago within six months and got a job with International Illustrated News, a Hearst Pictures syndicate. The job consisted of writing captions and headlines for the pictures and ordering them sent out to various papers by wire. In August, shortly after he returned to Chicago, he had announced to me that we would get married in a few days, when he'd turn twenty-one. I had no doubts about marrying him; I already knew that he was the love of my life, and by then we had been going together for three and a half years."

"Were you still in college then?"

"No. I had left the University of Chicago in the middle of my second year, because I had to go to work and earn money to help my mother. Dorothy, my older sister, had done the same thing. There were just the two of us. We'd been brought up by our widowed mother, who was working to support us."

I said to Cecille that I would love to know something about her family, but that she should tell me only what she thought I should know.

Without a moment's hesitation she said, "My father was an analytic and synthetic chemist. He saw a picture of my mother at the home of her uncle, in Leipzig, Germany, where my father was studying, and he immediately fell in love with her. He went to St. Louis, where she was going to school, to court her. They got married around 1902. I was born in Los Angeles, where my father was working as a chemist for a food-processing company. Apparently, some sort of chemical got into his system during his food-analyzing experiments, and he became ill and died in 1912, at the age of twenty-eight. I have no memory of him. After my father's death we moved from

Los Angeles to Chicago, where my mother's two older brothers and older sister lived. I started at the University of Chicago when I was sixteen—it was not unusual to skip half grades at school then. When I left, I got a job as an assistant to the features editor at the *Chicago Daily News*."

"How did your family get along with Mr. Shawn's?"

"Within a year and a half of my first meeting Bill, our families became very friendly.

Whenever Bill was in Chicago, he was always at my house. My mother was much younger than Annie. Annie belonged to a ladies' group that got together for lunches and teas, and did things like rolling bandages for hospitals. My mother, on the other hand, was a working woman. The two mothers became very close, however."

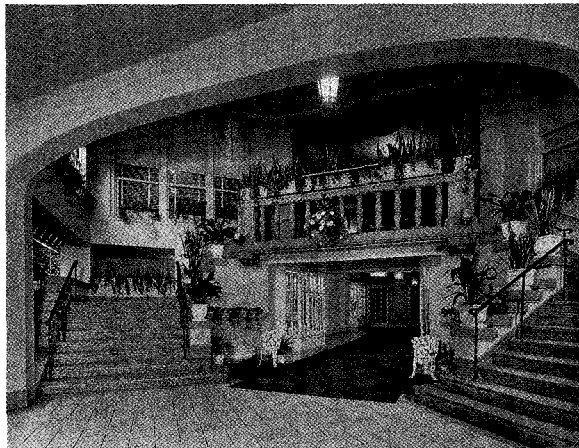
"Did you and Mr. Shawn have a big family wedding?"

"No. On his birthday—August 31, 1928—Bill went to the city clerk to get a marriage license. He'd chosen that date because he would be turning twenty-one and he would not have to ask the permission of his parents. But the clerk didn't believe he was twenty-one, so he had to go home, get his mother, and come back. We were married the next day—the first of September. It was a wedding with just the immediate family, and there was a family dinner. It was not a religious ceremony. Neither one of us was religious. My father had been an atheist, and Bill's father wasn't religious. Bill got the Labor Day weekend off for our honeymoon, and we went to the Edgewater Beach Hotel, on the North Side of Chicago, on the lakefront. In the middle of our second or third night at the hotel he got a call from his boss to come back, because of something to do with the airship of Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin. He had to get up and rush to work."

"Did you move in with the Chons?"

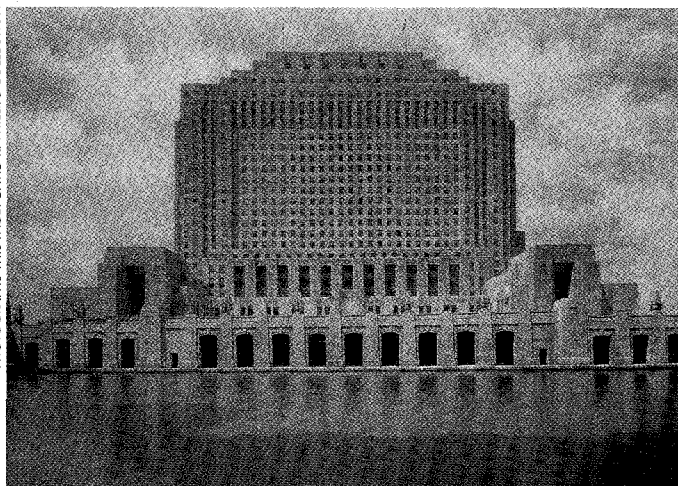
"No. We had a little apartment, which we furnished, on the Near North Side, a bohemian part of town. But we often went for dinner to Bill's family. I called Ben 'Dad'—

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*Facing page: the University of Michigan at about the time that Shawn was there. Above, Chicago's Edgewater Beach Hotel*



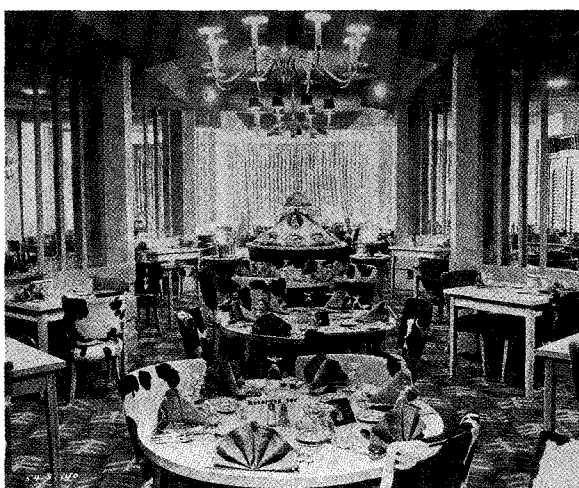
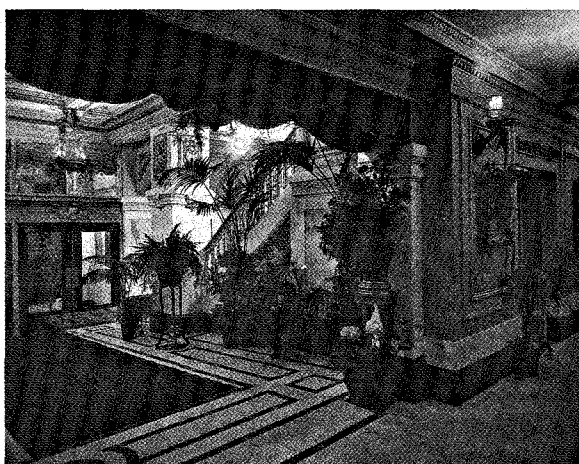


**From top: the old Chicago Daily News building; Chicago's Palace Theatre, a vaudeville mecca; and Benjamin Chon's club, the Saddle and Sirloin**

everyone called him that—and I called Annie ‘Mother.’ The atmosphere in the Chon house was sporting and theatrical. They played poker in the evenings, and every Saturday evening Ben and Annie went to the Palace Theatre to see a vaudeville show. The Palace had the best vaudeville in Chicago. Ben himself liked to act, and had acted in amateur productions of Shakespeare. I remember he would go around the house saying things like ‘Alas, poor Yorick!’ A year after our marriage he and Annie celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary, at his club, which was called Saddle and Sirloin, and was patronized by prosperous farmers and people who worked in the stockyards.”

“I’ve often heard that Mr. Shawn used to play the piano in Paris,” I said. “How did that come about?”

“Ben had taken Harold to Europe when he was sixteen, along with a friend who had a son of the same age. The trip was remembered in the family because Ben had actually kissed the Blarney Stone. One evening, when we were all having dinner, Bill and I mentioned to Ben as a piece of news



that our cousin Sylvia was engaged and was going to Europe for her honeymoon. Immediately Dad said, ‘You should also go to Europe,’ and he offered us the trip, with an impressive sum of money. As it happened, Sylvia broke her engagement, but Bill and I went anyway. In March of 1929 we sailed on the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, of the Holland America Line. My former boss, Herbert Davidson, had given me a letter of introduction to Paul Scott Mowrer, who was the head of the Paris office of the *Chicago Daily News*. In Paris, Bill was lucky enough to get a chance to play the piano at a café called La Cloche. He played in the early evening, while people had their apéritifs.”

“How long did you stay in Europe?”

“I had only a two-month leave of absence from work, but we wanted to stay on. Mowrer was very sympathetic and cabled the editor in chief in Chi-

cago on my behalf. A cable came back saying that my leave could be extended indefinitely. We spent three months in Paris and then a couple of months traveling through England and Italy, and we also went to Budapest. We stayed in pensions, as part of a student plan through the Holland America Line. As it happened, this was our only time abroad. We returned to the States the last weekend in August, for my sister’s wedding. Shortly after that the stock market crashed. Bill’s father had retired the year before, at the age of sixty-five, and Harold had taken over the jewelry shop in the stockyards. But Harold had never liked the jewelry business, and he ended up selling insurance for a living.”

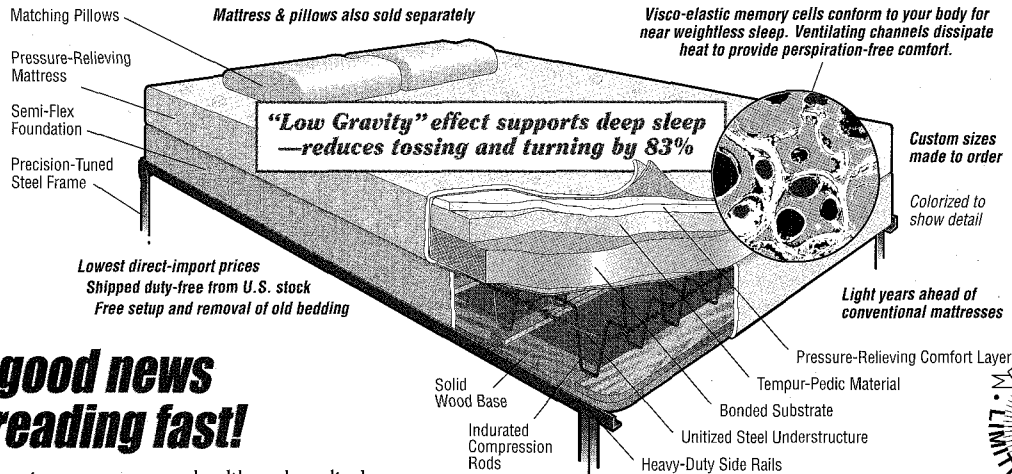
“The Depression must have been a very difficult period,” I said.

“Dad had lost some money in the crash, and it was extremely hard for anyone to get a job. Bill started freelancing. He wrote advertising copy—that’s what Mike was doing. But it was not satisfying, in terms of either work or pay. He published some short stories in the *Chicago Daily News*, but he wouldn’t permit his real name to be used. In the spring of 1932 he was completely out of work. We had some very Spartan times. All along he had been concentrating on songwriting. Since he couldn’t read music, he composed on the piano and had someone do



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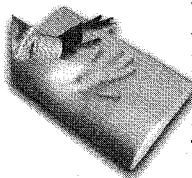
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the writing for him. He was drawn to New York. He hoped to get established there as a songwriter."

"Is that how you came to move to New York?"

"I myself couldn't, because I was working. My feature editor was fired, so I had to take over his job—I cost the company much less than he had. At that time people were being fired left and right. Bill was so depressed that I thought it would be good for his morale if he went to New York. We gave up our little apartment in Chicago, which we'd got when we came back from Paris, and we put our furniture in storage. I moved in with Bill's parents, and in March he went to New York. He received some commissions there. He was in New York alone for six months. Since I had a job, I sent him money. I was also able to visit him. I brought some of my work with me. Then Bill got a job writing publicity for J. C. Penney."

"When did you yourself move to New York?"

"In October, 1932. I gave up my job and came here. Soon after that Bill lost his job again. I couldn't get any work either. Eventually I had lunch with a reporter from the *World-Telegram*, and he suggested that I try to get freelance assignments from *The New Yorker*. I went to the magazine and met Don Wharton, the managing editor. He was glad to give me some assignments. I came home and turned them over to Bill, so that he would have some work to do. He was immediately able to do them. They required interviews and reporting, so he must have managed to overcome his shyness. At first he turned in notes for Talk of the Town, and someone at the office—most likely E. B. White, who in those days wrote the whole Talk section—rewrote them. Later they were rewritten by Russell Maloney. For a long time I was on the *New Yorker* books as having been given the assignments, but it was actually Bill who did them. So I actually got him his job, but I never told anyone that, because I didn't want people to think he couldn't have got it himself. In the beginning the contributions were paid for only when the pieces appeared. There was no regular system of payment. He got two dollars for every typeset inch of a Talk story that resulted from his notes."

"When was he taken on by *The New Yorker*?"

"In 1933. He was hired as a Talk reporter. He started going to the magazine, and was given an office, which he shared with Eugene Kinkead. Bill and I would often have dinner with Gene. I would pick Bill up from work—in later years I never went to the office, because he wanted to keep his private life separate. We would go to a restaurant named the Artists & Writers, also known as Bleeck's. It was where a lot of the *Herald Tribune* people gathered. We often sat with Wolcott Gibbs and his wife, and Ring Lardner and his wife. Anyway, in 1935 Mr. Ross asked Bill to become an associate editor. I think Bill moved into another office, but he didn't start editing pieces right away. There was a news meeting each Monday, and Bill was given the job of idea man. He

also contributed art ideas and wrote captions." In all the years that Mr. Shawn was at *The New Yorker*, he published only one piece readily identifiable as his. It was a one-page casual, titled "The Catastrophe," about the destruction of New York by a meteor while the rest of the world went about its business as usual. In keeping with his self-effacing nature, he signed it only with his initials. "In 1939 Bill became the managing editor of the fact department—journalism only—succeeding St. Clair McKelway." The managing editor for fiction was Gustave Loblano, and the one for art was James Geraghty. "Bill worked very hard, because that was his nature. As managing editor, he began to build up a group of writers. From the very beginning his relationships with them were very close. He cared about them, and they were devoted to him. After the war he expanded the group and instituted the system of staff writers with individual offices and drawing accounts, remembering from his early years at the magazine how hard it was not knowing when, or if, he would be paid."

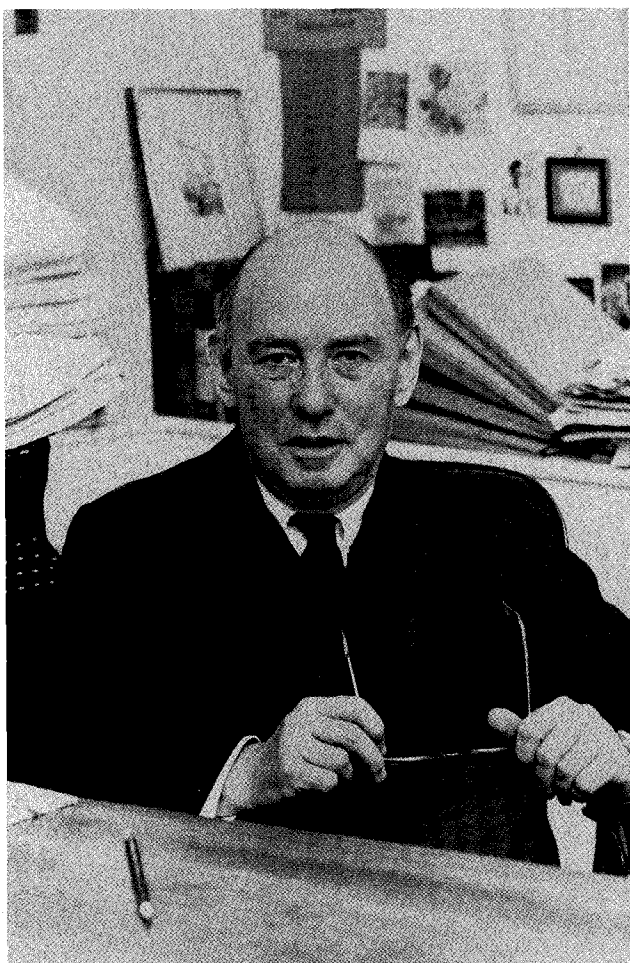
I asked her what parts of the city they had lived in over the years.

"When we first started living here, we had a room in the Beaux-Arts Hotel, in Tudor City, but once Bill had an office at the magazine, we moved to a one-room apartment on Gramercy Park. We then moved to Murray Hill, to an apartment on Thirty-sixth Street, then, after Bill became managing editor, to the Tuscany, on Thirty-ninth Street. After

**In all the  
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one piece readily  
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his—a one-page  
casual, about  
the destruction of  
New York by a  
meteor while the  
rest of the world  
went about its  
business as usual.**

that we moved to a newly built apartment hotel called Fifty Park Avenue. We were living there when Wallace was born, in 1943. The apartment was very small, and Wallace's nursery was a converted dining room." She said that in 1949 they started going to Bronxville every year for the summer, renting different houses. They chose Bronxville because some of the *New Yorker* writers lived there and because Mr. Shawn could easily be driven to the office and back every day. He would probably have been just as happy to stay in the city for the summer, but it was wonderful for the children and for her to get out to what the Shawns considered "the country." (Bronxville is actually a suburb of New York City.)





***The unofficial  
"official" photograph  
of William Shawn  
(1968)***

She went on, "We had waited to have children, and I was fortunate in getting pregnant as soon as we decided to try. I had no mind of my own; I always did whatever he wanted me to do. I always enjoyed being pregnant—it was comfortable, exhilarating, and I had easy births. We had five children in six years, but only three survived. My last pregnancy was in 1948, and that turned out to be the twins, Allen and Mary. They were not expected until late October, but they were born in August. Although they weighed four pounds each and were quite sizable, they were put in Davidson beds—with incubators and respirators—and they had to stay in the hospital for six weeks. Mary was less responsive than Allen, or responsive in a different way. She either suffered a brain injury at birth or received too much oxygen."

In all the years I had known the Shawns, I had never met Mary, and I remarked on that to Cecille. She said that Mary was very happy at her school, and that they didn't like to disturb her—the family mostly visited her there. In my experience of the Shawns, the subject of Mary was like an iceberg. The family valiantly kept psychologically afloat, but seemed to feel as if they could be sunk by coming near it. In fact, the mere mention of Mary would bring tears both to Cecille's eyes and to Mr. Shawn's. The boys hardly ever

spoke about her. Yet certainly the effect on Allen of his twin sister's missing out on nearly everything that he had must have been profound. I remember once talking to Mr. Shawn about her, and he said that emotionally and intellectually she was like a young child but that she was extremely attractive and lovable and enjoyed things like playing the piano in church.

In my conversation with Cecille, I quickly changed the subject, observing, "After the twins came along, you must have had to move again."

"Yes. We moved to a West End Avenue apartment. It was in an old building in the West Eighties. There was one bedroom for Bill and me, and one for the twins, and Wallace was again in the dining room. Maybe that explains why he likes to eat." She laughed. "We lived there until 1951, when we heard about an apartment at 1150 Fifth Avenue, which we ended up taking. Because it was on the second floor, much was later made of Bill's phobia of living high up. People said he was afraid of living higher than the second floor, but all our earlier apartments had been on higher floors."

"Did Mr. Shawn always work very long hours?"

"Yes. He might have been described as a workaholic—a word he wouldn't have allowed in the magazine. In December, 1971, when he was sixty-four, he had a heart attack. His symptoms, such as pain in the throat, were atypical. He recovered completely, and from then on never had an electrocardiogram that wasn't normal. After the heart attack, though, I never let him do anything that might frighten him and set off palpitations. The only reason he was able to go to the office was that it had become routine. He was very lucky that he found his work totally absorbing and enjoyable. Some people thought he was a benevolent dictator. He was always very firm about editorial matters. It was his nature to be kind, but when something didn't come up to his standards or agree with his opinions, he was inflexible—though, of course, he compromised if he was persuaded of the merit of something."

I asked whether Mr. Shawn had kept in touch with his family in Chicago.

"Yes. Although most of Bill's adult life was spent in New York, he retained a surprisingly deep connection with his family back home. Whenever he could get away, we would have family reunions in Chicago, and Bill and his brothers and sister would get together there and make music, often improvising. After he became the editor, he couldn't get away for reunions. Even when his father died, in December, 1952, he wasn't able to go to the funeral in Chicago, because I was in the hospital with bronchitis. Our last long trip was to Cambridge, in 1970, when Allen graduated from Harvard. But in 1988 Bill got the idea of our celebrating our sixtieth wedding anniversary in Bronxville, so that he could see all the relatives. When they were gathered, he looked very happy. He was glowing and completely relaxed." 🌸

# Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter

by CHITRA B. DIVAKARUNI

**W**HEN the alarm goes off at 5:00 A.M., buzzing like a trapped wasp, Mrs. Dutta has been lying awake for quite a while. She still has difficulty sleeping on the Perma Rest mattress that Sagar and Shyamoli, her son and daughter-in-law, have bought specially for her, though she has had it now for two months. It is too American-soft, unlike the reassuringly solid copra ticking she used at home. *But this is home now*, she reminds herself. She reaches hurriedly to turn off the alarm, but in the dark her fingers get confused among the knobs, and the electric clock falls with a thud to the floor. Its angry metallic call vibrates through the walls of her room, and she is sure it will wake everyone.

She yanks frantically at the wire until she feels it give, and in the abrupt silence that follows she hears herself breathing, a sound harsh and uneven and full of guilt.

Mrs. Dutta knows, of course, that this ruckus is her own fault. She should just not set the alarm. She does not need to get up early here in California, in her son's house. But the



habit, taught her by her mother-in-law when she was a bride of seventeen, *A good wife wakes before the rest of the household*, is one she finds impossible to break. How hard it was then to pull her unwilling body away from the sleep-warm clasp of her husband, Sagar's father, whom she had just learned to love; to stumble to the kitchen that smelled of stale garam

When Mrs. Dutta decided to give up her home of forty-five  
she had expected. Everyone knows, they said, that a wife's



masala and light the coal stove so that she could make morning tea for them all—her parents-in-law, her husband, his two younger brothers, and the widowed aunt who lived with them.

After dinner, when the family sits in front of the TV, she tries to tell her grandchildren about those days. “I was never good at starting that stove—the smoke stung my eyes, making me cough and cough. Breakfast was never ready on time, and my mother-in-law—oh, how she scolded me, until I was in tears. Every night I’d pray to Goddess Durga, please let me sleep late, just one morning!”

“Mmmm,” Pradeep says, bent over a model plane.

“Oooh, how awful,” Mrinalini says, wrinkling her nose politely before she turns back to a show filled with jokes that Mrs. Dutta does not understand.

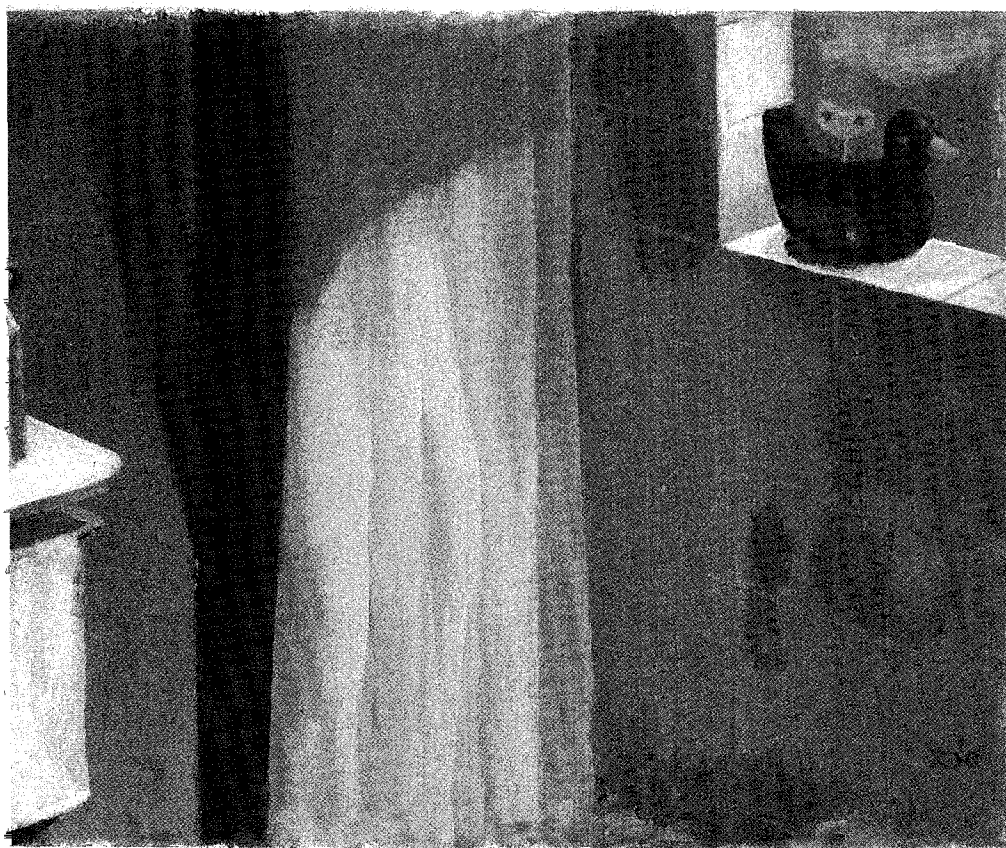
“That’s why you should sleep in now, Mother,” Shyamoli

From the floor where he leans against Shyamoli’s knee, Sagar adds, “We want you to be comfortable, Ma. To rest. That’s why we brought you to America.”

In spite of his thinning hair and the gold-rimmed glasses that he has recently taken to wearing, Sagar’s face seems to Mrs. Dutta still that of the boy she used to send off to primary school with his metal tiffin box. She remembers how he crawled into her bed on stormy monsoon nights, how when he was ill, no one else could make him drink his barley water. Her heart lightens in sudden gladness because she is really here, with him and his children in America. “Oh, Sagar,” she says, smiling, “now you’re talking like this! But did you give me a moment’s rest while you were growing up?” And she launches into a description of childhood pranks that has him shaking his head indulgently while disembodied TV laughter echoes through the room.

But later he comes into her bedroom and says, a little shamefaced, “Mother, please don’t get up so early in the morning. All that noise in the bathroom—it wakes us up, and Molli has such a long day at work . . .”

And she, turning a little so that he won’t see her foolish eyes filling with tears, as though she were a teenage bride again and not a woman well over sixty, nods her head, *yes, yes.*



says, smiling at her from the recliner where she sits looking through *The Wall Street Journal*. With her legs crossed so elegantly under the shimmery blue skirt she has changed into after work, and her unusually fair skin, she could pass for an American, thinks Mrs. Dutta, whose own skin is as brown as roasted cumin. The thought fills her with an uneasy pride.

But underneath she is thinking of the bleached-blue aerogram from Mrs. Basu that has been waiting unanswered on her bedside table all week, filled with news from home. Someone robbed the Sandhya jewelry store. The bandits had guns, but luckily no one was hurt. Mr. Joshi’s daughter, that sweet-faced child, has run away with

**W**AITING for the sounds of the stirring household to release her from the embrace of her Perma Rest mattress, Mrs. Dutta repeats the 108 holy names of God. *Om Keshavaya Namah, Om Narayanaya Namah, Om*

years to go to America, her relatives were less surprised than place is with her husband, and a widow’s is with her son

her singing teacher. Who would've thought it? Mrs. Barucha's daughter-in-law had one more baby girl. Yes, their fourth. You'd think they'd know better than to keep trying for a boy. Last Tuesday was Bangla Bandh, another labor strike, everything closed down, not even the buses running. But you can't really blame them, can you? After all, factory workers have to eat too. Mrs. Basu's tenants, whom she'd been trying to evict forever, finally moved out. Good riddance, but you should see the state of the flat.

At the very bottom Mrs. Basu wrote, *Are you happy in America?*

Mrs. Dutta knows that Mrs. Basu, who has been her closest friend since they both moved to Ghoshpara Lane as young brides, cannot be fobbed off with descriptions of Fisherman's Wharf and the Golden Gate Bridge, or even with anecdotes involving grandchildren. And so she has been putting off her reply, while in her heart family loyalty battles with insidious feelings of—but she turns from them quickly and will not name them even to herself.

Now Sagar is knocking on the children's doors—a curious custom this, children being allowed to close their doors against their parents. With relief Mrs. Dutta gathers up her bathroom things. She has plenty of time. Their mother will have to rap again before Pradeep and Mrinalini open their doors and stumble out. Still, Mrs. Dutta is not one to waste the precious morning. She splashes cold water on her face and neck (she does not believe in pampering herself), scrapes the night's gumminess from her tongue with her metal tongue cleaner, and brushes vigorously, though the minty toothpaste does not leave her mouth feeling as clean as does the bitter-sweet neem stick she's been using all her life. She combs the knots out of her hair. Even at her age it is thicker and silkier than her daughter-in-law's permed curls. *Such vanity*, she scolds her reflection, *and you a grandmother and a widow besides*. Still, as she deftly fashions her hair into a neat coil, she remembers how her husband would always compare it to monsoon clouds.

She hears a sudden commotion outside.

"Pat! Minnie! What d'you mean you still haven't washed up? I'm late to work every morning nowadays because of you kids."

"But, Mom, *she's* in there. She's been there forever . . ." Mrinalini says.

Pause. Then, "So go to the downstairs bathroom."

"But all our stuff is here," Pradeep says, and Mrinalini adds, "It's not fair. Why can't *she* go downstairs?"

A longer pause. Mrs. Dutta hopes that Shyamoli will not be too harsh with the girl. But a child who refers to elders in that disrespectful way ought to be punished. How many times did she slap Sagar for something far less, though he was her only one, the jewel of her eye, come to her after she had been married for seven years and everyone had given up hope? Whenever she lifted her hand to him, her heart

was pierced through and through. Such is a mother's duty.

But Shyamoli only says, in a tired voice, "That's enough! Go put on your clothes, hurry!"

The grumblings recede. Footsteps clatter down the stairs. Inside the bathroom Mrs. Dutta bends over the sink, fists tight in the folds of her sari. Hard with the pounding in her head to think what she feels most—anger at the children for their rudeness, or at Shyamoli for letting them go unrebuked. Or is it shame she feels (but why?), this burning, acid and indigestible, that coats her throat in molten metal?

**I**T is 9:00 A.M., and the house, after the flurry of departures, of frantic "I can't find my socks" and "Mom, he took my lunch money" and "I swear I'll leave you kids behind if you're not in the car in exactly one minute," has settled into its quiet daytime rhythms.

Busy in the kitchen, Mrs. Dutta has recovered her spirits. Holding on to grudges is too exhausting, and besides, the kitchen—sunlight spilling across its countertops while the refrigerator hums reassuringly in the background—is her favorite place.

Mrs. Dutta hums too as she fries potatoes for alu dum. Her voice is rusty and slightly off-key. In India she would never have ventured to sing, but with everyone gone the house is too quiet, all that silence pressing down on her like the heel of a giant hand, and the TV voices, with their strange foreign accents, are no help at all. As the potatoes turn golden-brown, she permits herself a moment of nostalgia for her Calcutta kitchen—the new gas stove she bought with the birthday money Sagar sent, the scoured-shiny brass pots stacked by the meat safe, the window with the lotus-pattern grille through which she could look down on white-uniformed children playing cricket after school. The mouthwatering smell of ginger and chili paste, ground fresh by Reba, the maid, and, in the evening, strong black Assam tea brewing in the kettle when Mrs. Basu came by to visit. In her mind she writes to Mrs. Basu: *Oh, Roma, I miss it all so much. Sometimes I feel that someone has reached in and torn out a handful of my chest.*

But only fools indulge in nostalgia, so Mrs. Dutta shakes her head clear of images and straightens up the kitchen. She pours the half-drunk glasses of milk down the sink, though Shyamoli has told her to save them in the refrigerator. But surely Shyamoli, a girl from a good Hindu family, doesn't expect her to put contaminated *jutha* things with the rest of the food. She washes the breakfast dishes by hand instead of letting them wait inside the dishwasher till night, breeding germs. With practiced fingers she throws an assortment of spices into the blender: coriander, cumin, cloves, black pepper, a few red chilies for vigor. No stale bottled curry powder for her. *At least the family's eating well since I arrived*, she writes in her mind. *Proper Indian food, puffed-up chapatis, fish curry in mustard sauce, and real pulao with raisins and*



cashews and ghee—the way you taught me, Roma—instead of Rice-a-roni. She would like to add, *They love it*, but thinking of Shyamoli, she hesitates.

At first Shyamoli was happy enough to have someone take over the cooking. “It’s wonderful to come home to a hot dinner,” she’d say. Or “Mother, what crispy papads, and your fish curry is out of this world.” But recently she has taken to picking at her food, and once or twice from the kitchen Mrs. Dutta has caught wisps of words, intensely whispered: “cholesterol,” “all putting on weight,” “she’s spoiling you.” And though Shyamoli always says no when the children ask if they can have burritos from the freezer instead, Mrs. Dutta suspects that she would really like to say yes.

The children. A heaviness pulls at Mrs. Dutta’s entire body when she thinks of them. Like so much in this country, they have turned out to be—yes, she might as well admit it—a disappointment.

For this she blames, in part, the Olan Mills portrait. Perhaps it was foolish of her to set so much store by a photograph, especially one taken years ago. But it was such a charming scene—Mrinalini in a ruffled white dress with her arm around her brother, Pradeep chubby and dimpled in a suit and bow tie, a glorious autumn forest blazing red and yellow behind them. (Later Mrs. Dutta was saddened to learn that the forest was merely a backdrop in a studio in California, where real trees did not turn such colors.)

The picture had arrived, silver-framed and wrapped in a plastic sheet filled with bubbles, with a note from Shyamoli explaining that it was a Mother’s Day gift. (A strange concept, a day set aside to honor mothers. Did the sahibs not honor their mothers the rest of the year, then?) For a week Mrs. Dutta could not decide where it should be hung. If she put it in the drawing room, visitors would be able to admire her grandchildren, but if she put it on the bedroom wall, she would be able to see the photo last thing before she fell asleep. She finally opted for the bedroom, and later, when she was too ill with pneumonia to leave her bed for a month, she was glad of it.

Mrs. Dutta was accustomed to living on her own. She had done it for three years after Sagar’s father died, politely but stubbornly declining the offers of various relatives, well-meaning and otherwise, to come and stay with her. In this she surprised herself as well as others, who thought of her as a shy, sheltered woman, one who would surely fall apart without her husband to handle things for her. But she managed quite well. She missed Sagar’s father, of course, especially in the evenings, when it had been his habit to read to her the more amusing parts of the newspaper while she rolled out chapatis. But once the grief receded, she found

she enjoyed being mistress of her own life, as she confided to Mrs. Basu. She liked being able, for the first time ever, to lie in bed all evening and read a new novel of Shankar’s straight through if she wanted, or to send out for hot eggplant pakoras on a rainy day without feeling guilty that she wasn’t serving up a balanced meal.

When the pneumonia hit, everything changed.

Mrs. Dutta had been ill before, but those illnesses had been different. Even in bed she’d been at the center of the household, with Reba coming to find out what should be cooked, Sagar’s father bringing her shirts with missing buttons, her mother-in-law, now old and tamed, complaining that the cook didn’t brew her tea strong enough, and Sagar running in crying because he’d had a fight with the neighbor boy. But now she had no one to ask her, querulously, *Just how long do you plan to remain sick?* No one waited in impatient exasperation for her to take on her duties again. No one’s life was inconvenienced the least bit by her illness.

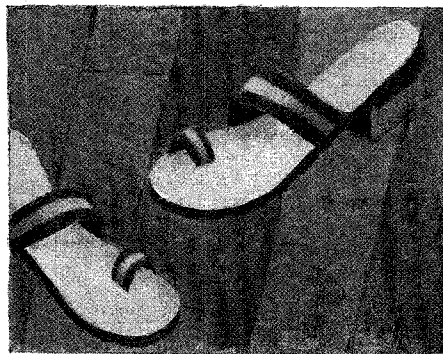
Therefore she had no reason to get well.

When this thought occurred to Mrs. Dutta, she was so frightened that her body grew numb. The walls of the room spun into blackness; the bed on which she lay, a vast four-poster she had shared with Sagar’s father since their wedding, rocked like a dinghy caught in a storm; and a great hollow roaring reverberated inside her head. For a moment, unable to move or see, she thought, *I’m dead*. Then her vision, desperate and blurry, caught on the portrait. *My grandchildren*. With some difficulty she focused on the bright, oblivious sheen of their faces, the eyes so like Sagar’s that for a moment heartsickness twisted inside her like a living thing. She drew a shudder of breath into her aching lungs, and the roaring seemed to recede. When the afternoon post brought another letter from Sagar—*Mother, you really should come and live with us. We worry about you all alone in India, especially when you’re sick like this—*

*she wrote back the same day, with fingers that still shook a little, You’re right: my place is with you, with my grandchildren.*

But now that she is here on the other side of the world, she is wrenched by doubt. She knows the grandchildren love her—how can it be otherwise among family? And she loves them, she reminds herself, even though they have put away, some-

where in the back of a closet, the vellum-bound *Ramayana for Young Readers* that she carried all the way from India in her hand luggage. Even though their bodies twitch with impatience when she tries to tell them stories of her girlhood. Even though they offer the most transparent excuses when she asks them to sit with her while she chants the evening prayers. *They’re flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood*, she reminds her-



self. But sometimes when she listens, from the other room, to them speaking on the phone, their American voices rising in excitement as they discuss a glittering, alien world of Power Rangers, Metallica, and Spirit Week at school, she almost cannot believe what she hears.

**S**TEPPING into the back yard with a bucket of newly washed clothes, Mrs. Dutta views the sky with some anxiety. The butter-gold sunlight is gone, black-bellied clouds have taken over the horizon, and the air feels still and heavy on her face, as before a Bengal storm. What if her clothes don't dry by the time the others return home?

Washing clothes has been a problem for Mrs. Dutta ever since she arrived in California.

"We can't, Mother," Shyamoli said with a sigh when Mrs. Dutta asked Sagar to put up a clothesline for her in the back yard. (Shyamoli sighed often nowadays. Perhaps it was an American habit? Mrs. Dutta did not remember that the Indian Shyamoli, the docile bride she'd mothered for a month before putting her on a Pan Am flight to join her husband, pursed her lips in quite this way to let out a breath at once patient and exasperated.) "It's just not *done*, not in a nice neighborhood like this one. And being the only Indian family on the street, we

have to be extra careful. People here sometimes—" She broke off with a shake of her head. "Why don't you just keep your dirty clothes in the hamper I've put in your room, and I'll wash them on Sunday along with everyone else's."

Afraid of causing another sigh, Mrs. Dutta agreed reluctantly. She knew she should not store unclean clothes in the same room where she kept the pictures of her gods. That would bring bad luck. And the odor. Lying in bed at night she could smell it distinctly, even though Shyamoli claimed that the hamper was airtight. The sour, starchy old-woman smell embarrassed her.

She was more embarrassed when, on Sunday afternoons, Shyamoli brought the laundry into the family room to fold. Mrs. Dutta would bend intently over her knitting, face tingling with shame, as her daughter-in-law nonchalantly shook out the wisps of lace, magenta and sea-green and black, that were her panties, placing them next to a stack of Sagar's briefs. And when, right in front of everyone, Shyamoli pulled out Mrs. Dutta's crumpled, baggy bras from the heap, she wished the ground would open up and swallow her, like the Sita of mythology.

Then one day Shyamoli set the clothes basket down in front of Sagar.

"Can you do them today, Sagar?" (Mrs. Dutta, who had never, through the forty-two years of her marriage, addressed Sagar's father by name, tried not to wince.) "I've got to get that sales report into the computer by tonight."

Before Sagar could respond, Mrs. Dutta was out of her chair, knitting needles dropping to the floor.

"No, no, no, clothes and all is no work for the man of the house. I'll do it." The thought of her son's hands searching through the basket and lifting up his wife's—and her own—underclothes filled her with horror.

"Mother!" Shyamoli said. "This is why Indian men are so useless around the house. Here in America we don't believe in men's work and women's work. Don't I work outside all day, just like Sagar? How'll I manage if he doesn't help me at home?"

"I'll help you instead," Mrs. Dutta ventured.

"You don't understand, do you, Mother?" Shyamoli said with a shaky smile. Then she went into the study.

Mrs. Dutta sat down in her chair and tried to understand. But after a while she gave up and whispered to Sagar that she wanted him to teach her how to run the washer and dryer.

"Why, Mother? Molli's quite happy to . . ."

"I've got to learn it . . ." Her voice was low and desperate as she rummaged through the tangled heap for her clothes.

Her son began to object and then shrugged. "Oh, very well. If it makes you happy."

But later, when she faced the machines alone, their cryptic symbols and rows of gleaming knobs terrified her. What if she pressed the wrong button and flooded the entire floor with soapsuds? What if she couldn't turn the machines off and

## IN THE BATTING CAGE

Though the once seen, now unseen, may drop away  
and hitter and spectator sigh,  
complaining that the light distorts  
the arc of flight, the blinking electric eye that says  
the mechanism upthrusting its miraculous arm  
disarms even the most alert—  
it's meant to hurt your pride—  
you nevertheless take the plate  
and set the dial at Triple-A.

Did he play? the teenaged boy with batting glove  
and sponsored gear wanted to know,  
which made my day, or night, I should say,  
as the batting cage became a holy place, draperies  
of wire mesh swooping down in graceful folds  
to net and return each ball you hit,  
no misses out of thirty thrown,  
as the banks of sulfur lights came on  
and the kid high-fived you and took your place.

—LYNNE MCMAHON



they kept going, whirring maniacally, until they exploded? (This had happened on a TV show just the other day. Everyone else had laughed at the woman who jumped up and down, screaming hysterically, but Mrs. Dutta sat stiff-spined, gripping the armrests of her chair.) So she has taken to washing her clothes in the bathtub when she is alone. She never did such a chore before, but she remembers how the village washerwomen of her childhood would beat their saris clean against river rocks. And a curious satisfaction fills her as her clothes hit the porcelain with the same solid wet *thunk*.

My small victory, my secret.

This is why everything must be dried and put safely away before Shyamoli returns. Ignorance, as Mrs. Dutta knows well from years of managing a household, is a great promoter of harmony. So she keeps an eye on the menacing advance of the clouds as she hangs up her blouses and underwear, as she drapes her sari along the redwood fence that separates her son's property from the neighbor's, first wiping the fence clean with a dish towel she has secretly taken from the bottom drawer in the kitchen. But she isn't worried. Hasn't she managed every time, even after that freak hailstorm last month, when she had to use the iron from the laundry closet to press everything dry? The memory pleases her. In her mind she writes to Mrs. Basu: *I'm fitting in so well here, you'd never guess I came only two months back. I've found new ways of doing things, of solving problems creatively. You would be most proud if you saw me.*

**W**HEN Mrs. Dutta decided to give up her home of forty-five years, her relatives showed far less surprise than she had expected. "Oh, we all knew you'd end up in America sooner or later," they said. She had been foolish to stay on alone so long after Sagar's father, may he find eternal peace, passed away. Good thing that boy of hers had come to his senses and called her to join him. Everyone knows a wife's place is with her husband, and a widow's is with her son.

Mrs. Dutta had nodded in meek agreement, ashamed to let anyone know that the night before she had awakened weeping.

"Well, now that you're going, what'll happen to all your things?" they asked.

Mrs. Dutta, still troubled over those traitorous tears, had offered up her household effects in propitiation. "Here, Didi, you take this cutwork bedspread. Mashima, for a long time I have meant for you to have these Corning Ware dishes; I know how much you admire them. And Boudi, this tape recorder that Sagar sent a year back is for you. Yes, yes, I'm quite sure. I can always tell Sagar to buy me another one when I get there."

Mrs. Basu, coming in just as a cousin made off triumphantly with a bone-china tea set, had protested. "Pra-

meela, have you gone crazy? That tea set used to belong to your mother-in-law."

"But what'll I do with it in America? Shyamoli has her own set—"

A look that Mrs. Dutta couldn't read flitted across Mrs. Basu's face. "But do you want to drink from it for the rest of your life?"

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Basu hesitated. Then she said, "What if you don't like it there?"

"How can I not like it, Roma?" Mrs. Dutta's voice was strident, even to her own ears. With an effort she controlled it and continued. "I'll miss my friends, I know—and you most of all. And the things we do together—evening tea, our walk around Rabindra Sarobar Lake, Thursday night Bhagavad Gita class. But Sagar—they're my only family. And blood is blood, after all."

"I wonder," Mrs. Basu said drily, and Mrs. Dutta recalled that though both of Mrs. Basu's children lived just a day's journey away, they came to see her only on occasions when common decency dictated their presence. Perhaps they were tightfisted in money matters, too. Perhaps that was why Mrs. Basu had started renting out her downstairs a few years earlier, even though, as anyone in Calcutta knew, tenants were more trouble than they were worth. Such filial neglect must be hard to take, though Mrs. Basu, loyal to her children as indeed a mother should be, never complained. In a way, Mrs. Dutta had been better off, with Sagar too far away for her to put his love to the test.

"At least don't give up the house," Mrs. Basu was saying. "You won't be able to find another place in case . . ."

"In case what?" Mrs. Dutta asked, her words like stone chips. She was surprised to find that she was angrier with Mrs. Basu than she'd ever been. Or was she afraid? *My son isn't like yours*, she'd been on the verge of spitting out. She took a deep breath and made herself smile, made herself remember that she might never see her friend again.

"Ah, Roma," she said, putting her arm around Mrs. Basu. "You think I'm such an old witch that my Sagar and my Shyamoli will be unable to live with me?"

**M**RS. Dutta hums a popular Tagore song as she pulls her sari from the fence. It's been a good day, as good as it can be in a country where you might stare out the window for hours and not see one living soul. No vegetable vendors with enormous wicker baskets balanced on their heads, no knife sharpeners with their distinctive call—*scissors-knives-choppers, scissors-knives-choppers*—to bring the children running. No peasant women with colorful tattoos on their arms to sell you cookware in exchange for your old silk saris. Why, even the animals that frequented Ghoshpara Lane had personality—stray dogs that knew to line up

outside the kitchen door just when the leftovers were likely to be thrown out; the goat that maneuvered its head through the garden grille hoping to get at her dahlias; cows that planted themselves majestically in the center of the road, ignoring honking drivers. And right across the street was Mrs. Basu's two-story house, which Mrs. Dutta knew as well as her own. How many times had she walked up the stairs to that airy room, painted sea-green and filled with plants, where her friend would be waiting for her?

*What took you so long today, Prameela? Your tea is cold already.*

*Wait till you hear what happened, Roma. Then you won't scold me for being late—*

*Stop it, you silly woman, Mrs. Dutta tells herself severely. Every single one of your relatives would give an arm and a leg to be in your place, you know that. After lunch you're going to write a nice letter to Roma telling her exactly how delighted you are to be here.*

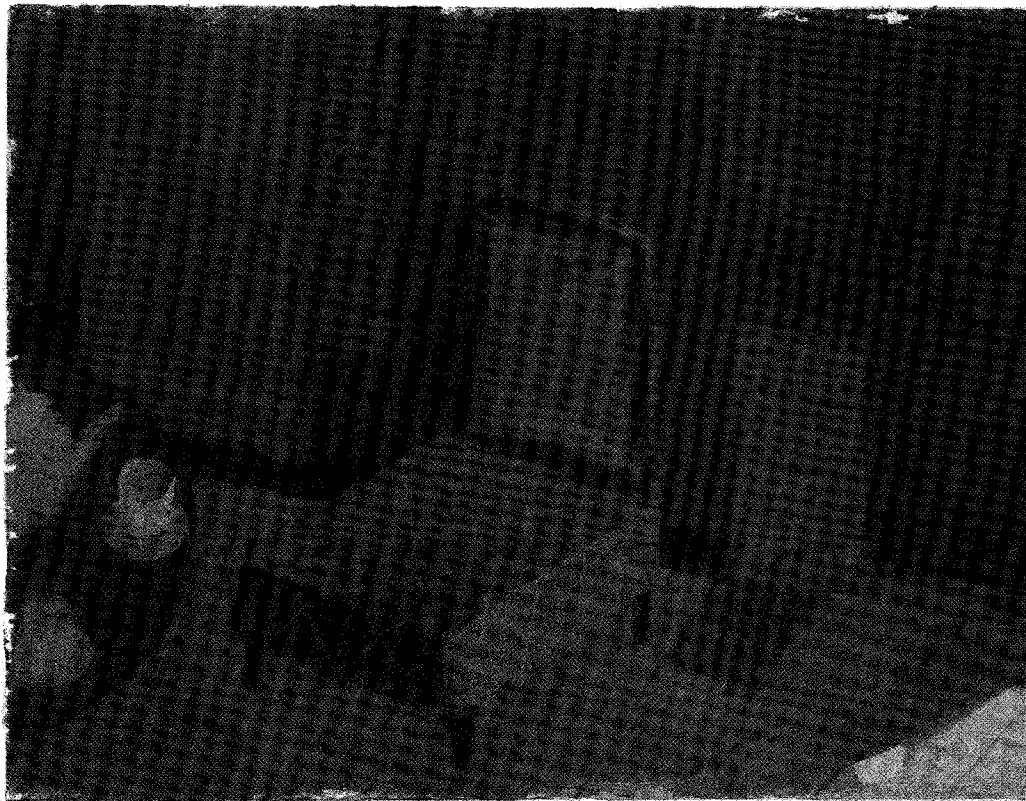
From where Mrs. Dutta stands, gathering up petticoats and blouses, she can look into the next yard. Not that there's much to see—just tidy grass and a few pale-blue flowers whose name she doesn't know. Two wooden chairs sit under a tree, but Mrs. Dutta has never seen anyone using them. *What's the point of having such a big yard if you're not even going to sit in it?* she thinks. Calcutta pushes itself into her mind again, with its narrow, blackened flats where families of six and eight and ten squeeze themselves into two tiny rooms, and her heart fills with a sense of loss she knows to be illogical.

When she first arrived in Sagar's home, Mrs. Dutta wanted to go over and meet her next-door neighbors, maybe take them some of her special sweet rasogollahs, as she'd often done with Mrs. Basu. But Shyamoli said she shouldn't. Such things were not the custom in California, she explained earnestly. You didn't just drop in on people without calling ahead. Here everyone was busy; they didn't sit around chatting, drinking endless cups of sugar-tea. Why, they might even say something unpleasant to her.

"For what?" Mrs. Dutta had asked disbelievingly, and

Shyamoli had said, "Because Americans don't like neighbors to"—here she used an English phrase—"invade their privacy." Mrs. Dutta, who didn't fully understand the word "privacy," because there was no such term in Bengali, had gazed at her daughter-in-law in some bewilderment. But she understood enough not to ask again. In the following months, though, she often looked over the fence, hoping to make contact. People were people, whether in India or in America, and everyone appreciated a friendly face. When Shyamoli was as old as Mrs. Dutta, she would know that too.

Today, just as she is about to turn away, out of the corner of her eye Mrs. Dutta notices a movement. At one of the windows a woman is standing, her hair a sleek gold like that of the TV heroines whose exploits baffle Mrs. Dutta when she tunes in to an afternoon serial. She is smoking a cigarette, and a curl of gray rises lazily, elegantly, from her fingers. Mrs. Dutta is so



happy to see another human being in the middle of her solitary day that she forgets how much she disapproves of smoking, especially in women. She lifts her hand in the gesture she has seen her grandchildren use to wave an eager hello.

The woman stares back at Mrs. Dutta. Her lips are a perfect painted red, and when she raises her cigarette to her mouth, its tip glows like an animal's eye. She does not wave back or smile. Perhaps she is not well? Mrs. Dutta feels sorry for her, alone in her illness in a silent house with only cigarettes for solace, and she wishes the etiquette of America did not prevent her from walking over with a word of cheer and a bowl of her fresh-cooked alu dum.



**M**RS. Dutta rarely gets a chance to be alone with her son. In the morning he is in too much of a hurry even to drink the fragrant cardamom tea that she (remembering how as a child he would always beg for a sip from her cup) offers to make him. He doesn't return until dinnertime, and afterward he must help the children with their homework, read the paper, hear the details of Shyamoli's day, watch his favorite TV crime show in order to unwind, and take out the garbage. In between, for he is a solicitous son, he converses with Mrs. Dutta. In response to his questions she assures him that her arthritis is much better now; no, no, she's not growing bored being at home all the time; she has everything she needs—Shyamoli has been so kind. But perhaps he could pick up a few aerograms on his way back tomorrow? She obediently recites for him an edited list of her day's activities, and smiles when he praises her cooking. But when he says,

"Khoka," she says, calling him by a childhood name she hasn't used in years, "I could fry you two-three hot-hot luchis, if you like." As she waits for his reply, she can feel, in the hollow of her throat, the rapid thud of her heart. And when he says yes, that would be very nice, she shuts her eyes tight and takes a deep breath, and it is as though merciful time has given her back her youth, that sweet, aching urgency of being needed again.

**M**RS. Dutta is telling Sagar a story.

"When you were a child, how scared you were of injections! One time, when the government doctor came to give us compulsory typhoid shots, you locked yourself in the bathroom and refused to come out. Do you remember what your father finally did? He went into the garden and caught

a lizard and threw it in the bathroom window, because you were even more scared of lizards than of shots. And in exactly one second you ran out screaming—right into the waiting doctor's arms."

Sagar laughs so hard that he almost upsets his tea (made with real sugar, because Mrs. Dutta knows it is better for her son than that chemical powder Shyamoli likes to use). There are tears in his eyes, and Mrs. Dutta, who had not dared to hope that he would find her story so amusing, feels gratified. When he takes off his glasses to wipe them, his face is oddly young, not like a father's at all, or even a husband's, and she

has to suppress an impulse to put out her hand and rub away the indentations that the glasses have left on his nose.

"I'd totally forgotten," Sagar says. "How can you keep track of those old, old things?"

*Because it is the lot of mothers to remember what no one else cares to,* Mrs. Dutta thinks. *To tell those stories over and over, until they are lodged, perforce, in family lore. We are the keepers of the heart's dusty corners.*

But as she starts to say this, the front door creaks open, and she hears the faint click of Shyamoli's high heels. Mrs. Dutta rises, collecting the dirty dishes.

"Call me fifteen minutes before you're ready to eat, so



"Oh, well, time to turn in, another working day tomorrow," she feels a vague pain, like hunger, in the region of her heart.

So it is with the delighted air of a child who has been offered an unexpected gift that she leaves her half-written letter to greet Sagar at the door today, a good hour before Shyamoli is due back. The children are busy in the family room doing homework and watching cartoons (mostly the latter, Mrs. Dutta suspects). But for once she doesn't mind, because they race in to give their father hurried hugs and then race back again. And she has him, her son, all to herself in a kitchen filled with the familiar, pungent odors of tamarind sauce and chopped coriander leaves.

that I can fry fresh luchis for everyone," she tells Sagar.

"You don't have to leave, Mother," he says.

Mrs. Dutta smiles her pleasure but doesn't stop. She knows that Shyamoli likes to be alone with her husband at this time, and today, in her happiness, she does not grudge her this.

"You think I've nothing to do, only sit and gossip with you?" she mock-scolds. "I want you to know I have a very important letter to finish."

Somewhere behind her she hears a thud—a briefcase falling over. This surprises her. Shyamoli is always careful with it, because it was a gift from Sagar when she was finally made a manager in her company.

"Hi!" Sagar calls, and when there's no answer, "Hey, Molli, you okay?"

Shyamoli comes into the room slowly, her hair disheveled as though she has been running her fingers through it. Hot color blotches her cheeks.

"What's the matter, Molli?" Sagar walks over to give her a kiss. "Bad day at work?" Mrs. Dutta, embarrassed as always by this display of marital affection, turns toward the window, but not before she sees Shyamoli move her face away.

"Leave me alone." Her voice is low, shaking. "Just leave me alone."

"But what is it?" Sagar says with concern.

"I don't want to talk about it right now." Shyamoli lowers herself into a kitchen chair and puts her face in her hands. Sagar stands in the middle of the room, looking helpless. He raises his hand and lets it fall, as though he wants to comfort his wife but is afraid of what she might do.

A protective anger for her son surges inside Mrs. Dutta, but she moves away silently. In her mind-letter she writes, *Women need to be strong, not react to every little thing like this. You and I, Roma, we had far worse to cry about, but we shed our tears invisibly. We were good wives and daughters-in-law, good mothers. Dutiful, uncomplaining. Never putting ourselves first.*

A sudden memory comes to her, one she hasn't thought of in years—a day when she scorched a special kheer dessert. Her mother-in-law had shouted at her, "Didn't your mother teach you anything, you useless girl?" As punishment she refused to let Mrs. Dutta go with Mrs. Basu to the cinema, even though *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*, which all Calcutta was crazy about, was playing, and their tickets were bought already. Mrs. Dutta had wept the entire afternoon, but before Sagar's father came home, she washed her face carefully with cold water and applied *kajal* to her eyes so that he wouldn't know.

But everything is getting mixed up, and her own young, trying-not-to-cry face blurs into another—why, it's Shyamoli's—and a thought hits her so sharply in the chest that she has to hold on to her bedroom wall to keep from falling.

*And what good did it do? The more we bent, the more people pushed us, until one day we'd forgotten that we could stand up straight. Maybe Shyamoli's the one with the right idea after all . . .*

Mrs. Dutta lowers herself heavily onto her bed, trying to erase such an insidious idea from her mind. Oh, this new country, where all the rules are upside down, it's confusing her. The

space inside her skull feels stirred up, like a pond in which too many water buffaloes have been wading. Maybe things will settle down if she can focus on the letter to Roma.

Then she remembers that she has left the half-written aerogram on the kitchen table. She knows she should wait until after dinner, after her son and his wife have sorted things out. But a restlessness—or is it defiance?—has taken hold of her. She is

sorry that Shyamoli is upset, but why should she have to waste her evening because of that? She'll go get her letter—it's no crime, is it? She'll march right in and pick it up, and even if Shyamoli stops in mid-sentence with another one of those sighs, she'll refuse to feel apologetic. Besides, by now they're probably in the family room, watching TV.

*Really, Roma, she writes in her head, as she feels her way along the unlighted corridor, the amount of TV they watch here is quite scandalous. The children, too, sitting for hours in front of that box like they've been turned into painted dolls, and then talking back when I tell them to turn it off.* Of course she will never put such blasphemy into a real letter. Still, it makes her feel better to be able to say it, if only to herself.

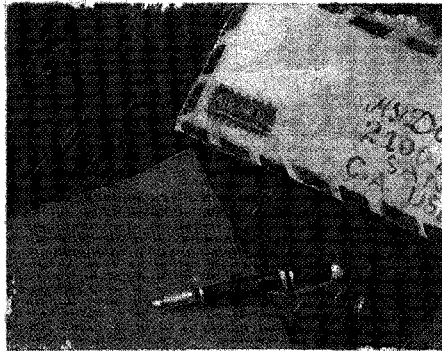
In the family room the TV is on, but for once no one is paying it any attention. Shyamoli and Sagar sit on the sofa, conversing. From where she stands in the corridor, Mrs. Dutta cannot see them, but their shadows—enormous against the wall where the table lamp has cast them—seem to flicker and leap at her.

She is about to slip unseen into the kitchen when Shyamoli's rising voice arrests her. In its raw, shaking unhappiness it is so unlike her daughter-in-law's assured tones that Mrs. Dutta is no more able to move away from it than if she had heard the call of the *nishi*, the lost souls of the dead, the subject of so many of the tales on which she grew up.

"It's easy for you to say 'Calm down.' I'd like to see how calm *you'd* be if she came up to you and said, 'Kindly tell the old lady not to hang her clothes over the fence into my yard.' She said it twice, like I didn't understand English, like I was a savage. All these years I've been so careful not to give these Americans a chance to say something like this, and now—"

"Shhh, Shyamoli, I said I'd talk to Mother about it."

"You always say that, but you never *do* anything. You're too busy being the perfect son, tiptoeing around





her feelings. But how about mine? Aren't I a person too?"

"Hush, Molli, the children . . ."

"Let them hear. I don't care anymore. Besides, they're not stupid. They already know what a hard time I've been having with her. You're the only one who refuses to see it."

In the passage Mrs. Dutta shrinks against the wall. She wants to move away, to hear nothing else, but her feet are formed of cement, impossible to lift, and Shyamoli's words pour into her ears like fire.

"I've explained over and over, and she still does what I've asked her not to—throwing away perfectly good food, leaving dishes to drip all over the countertops. Ordering my children to stop doing things I've given them permission to do. She's taken over the entire kitchen, cooking whatever she likes. You come in the door and the smell of grease is everywhere, in all our clothes even. I feel like this isn't my house anymore."

"Be patient, Molli. She's an old woman, after all."

"I know. That's why I tried so hard. I know having her here is important to you. But I can't do it any longer. I just can't. Some days I feel like taking the kids and leaving." Shyamoli's voice disappears into a sob.

A shadow stumbles across the wall to her, and then another. Behind the weatherman's nasal tones, announcing a week of sunny days, Mrs. Dutta can hear a high, frightened weeping. The children, she thinks. This must be the first time they've seen their mother cry.

"Don't talk like that, sweetheart." Sagar leans forward, his voice, too, anguished. All the shadows on the wall shiver and merge into a single dark silhouette.

Mrs. Dutta stares at that silhouette, the solidarity of it. Sagar and Shyamoli's murmurs are lost beneath the noise in her head, a dry humming—like thirsty birds, she thinks wonderingly. After a while she discovers that she has reached her room. In darkness she lowers herself onto her bed very gently, as though her body were made of the thinnest glass. Or perhaps ice—she is so cold. She sits for a long time with her eyes closed, while inside her head thoughts whirl faster and faster until they disappear in a gray dust storm.



HEN Pradeep finally comes to call her for dinner, Mrs. Dutta follows him to the kitchen, where she fries luchis for everyone, the perfect circles of dough puffing up crisp and golden as always. Sagar and Shyamoli have reached a truce of some kind: she gives him a small smile, and he puts out a casual hand to massage the back of her neck. Mrs. Dutta shows no embarrassment at this. She eats her dinner. She answers questions put to her. She laughs when someone makes a joke. If her face is stiff, as though she had been given a shot of Novocain, no one notices. When the table is cleared, she excuses herself, saying she has to finish her letter.

Now Mrs. Dutta sits on her bed, reading over what she wrote in the innocent afternoon.

Dear Roma,

*Although I miss you, I know you will be pleased to hear how happy I am in America. There is much here that needs getting used to, but we are no strangers to adjusting, we old women. After all, haven't we been doing it all our lives?*

*Today I'm cooking one of Sagar's favorite dishes, alu dum. It gives me such pleasure to see my family gathered around the table, eating my food. The children are still a little shy of me, but I am hopeful that we'll soon be friends. And Shyamoli, so confident and successful—you should see her when she's all dressed for work. I can't believe she's the same timid bride I sent off to America just a few years ago. But Sagar, most of all, is the joy of my old age. . . .*

With the edge of her sari Mrs. Dutta carefully wipes a tear that has fallen on the aerogram. She blows on the damp spot until it is completely dry, so the pen will not leave a telltale smudge. Even though Roma would not tell a soul, she cannot risk it. She can already hear them, the avid relatives in India who've been waiting for something just like this to happen. *That Dutta-ginni, so set in her ways, we knew she'd never get along with her daughter-in-law. Or, worse, Did you hear about poor Prameela? How her family treated her? Yes, even her son, can you imagine?*

This much surely she owes to Sagar.

And what does she owe herself, Mrs. Dutta, falling through black night with all the certainties she trusted in collapsed upon themselves like imploded stars, and only an image inside her eyelids for company? A silhouette—man, wife, children, joined on a wall—showing her how alone she is in this land of young people. And how unnecessary.

She is not sure how long she sits under the glare of the overhead light, how long her hands clench themselves in her lap. When she opens them, nail marks line the soft flesh of her palms, red hieroglyphs—her body's language, telling her what to do.

Dear Roma, Mrs. Dutta writes,

*I cannot answer your question about whether I am happy, for I am no longer sure I know what happiness is. All I know is that it isn't what I thought it to be. It isn't about being needed. It isn't about being with family either. It has something to do with love, I still think that, but in a different way than I believed earlier, a way I don't have the words to explain. Perhaps we can figure it out together, two old women drinking cha in your downstairs flat (for I do hope you will rent it to me on my return) while around us gossip falls—but lightly, like summer rain, for that is all we will allow it to be. If I'm lucky—and perhaps, in spite of all that has happened, I am—the happiness will be in the figuring out.*

Pausing to read over what she has written, Mrs. Dutta is surprised to discover this: now that she no longer cares whether tears blotch her letter, she feels no need to weep. ☽



RANDALL MICHELSON

## A Cinema of Private Lives

*A critical preview of the next wave of independent films*

**S** NOW-DIZZIED January in Park City, Utah, used to be a time for skiers only. But for the past fourteen years, under the sponsorship of Robert Redford, the Sundance Film Festival has been a showcase for independent films—a category that has grown as fuzzy as the snowy mounds that people flounder through to view the films in eight different theaters. The term “independent film”—one not made by any of the seven major studios—used to call up images of Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland saying “Hey, kids, let’s put on a show!” Unknown amateurs would improvise with their own resources, bringing into being something that was fresh precisely because it was not professional.

But now most of the films on display at Sundance are very professional, and professionally hyped. Journalists who have signed up to attend are lobbied ahead

of time by publicists’ phone calls and faxes. Stars are brought in for press conferences—even if you didn’t know who they were, you could identify them by their dry shoes. While others slosh through over-the-ankles ice puddles, Nick Nolte is deposited at the site of his appearance wearing neat white sneakers under an ankle-length black raincoat (flasher’s standard issue). Flacks for the various movies ply the town’s little main street wearing sweatshirts with film logos on them, handing out press releases and gewgaws (one steamy Brazilian entry was promoted with souvenir condoms packaged in the movie’s poster symbol).

And most of these films aren’t “small.” The budgets of the major contenders are more likely to be in the millions than in the thousands. Filmmakers regularly say, “I hope I can win some prize in order to pay my backers.” The real prize is not a

jury award (though that can help) but purchase by a distributor. Most of the films that come here have no guarantee that they will ever be exhibited in a theater. In fact, most of them won’t.

The push of “independents” around the edges of the distribution-exhibition process has come because too many movies are being made for too few theaters. There were 2,500 applications for films to be shown during the ten days of this year’s festival, which ran from January 15 to 25. Even the relatively few films that do get into theaters will, most of them, fare poorly. At a panel discussion Ella Taylor, of *LA Weekly*, said that hers is one of the few journals to review all films—and she is finding that harder and harder to do. And without reviews how can a film get an audience? One hope for independents is the multiplex nest of theaters in a single building. But the major films muscle into several of these theaters at once, pushing out the little-heralded or the films that lack mass appeal.

Michael Friend, the director of film archives for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, chairing a panel on avant-garde films, brought the unwelcome news that movies may become obsolete in a world where so many other visual media compete for people’s attention. “More people logged onto NASA’s Web site when *Pathfinder* landed on Mars than saw *E.T.*, *Batman*, and *Titanic* all together,” he said. But despite warnings like this one, film schools keep training would-be directors and writers. Network news, MTV, cable shows, and sitcoms keep training camera, lighting, and editing professionals who have hopes of becoming artists in the “major medium.” What we have as a result is less the talented newcomer with a fresh vision than a glut of professionals scrounging around for some useful vehicle—and it shows. The weakest thing in most of the films on display was the script. Skilled camera work and deft editing were put at the service of thin plot material or strained premises. Of the thirty-six features I saw, perhaps nine were worth paying money to see. (The shorts were better, but their marketing possibilities are even more limited.)

*Montana*, for instance, a mob picture



with a glamorous female "hit man" (Kyra Sedgwick) and a finely nuanced performance by Stanley Tucci as her mentor, had a hard-driving pace, but the sappy loyalty of Sedgwick to the mob boss was totally unbelievable. I asked the writing team of brothers Jon and Erich Hoeber about this, and Jon said, "Yeah, we didn't include the back story that would have explained her loyalty." That was not all that was lost. The Sedgwick character picks up from her dying mentor a silly childhood song—but the first occurrence of the song, which would have explained its emotional meaning, was cut. The director, twenty-six-year-old Jennifer Leitzes, whose first feature this was, noted that the film had to be shot within thirty days in New York City—"You all know how hard it is even to get around by subway in New York."

These are faults that may be repaired before the film goes into distribution. Many films show up at Sundance not entirely polished. Meeting the deadlines for submission means haste and shortcuts. Yet the directors complain that distribution companies try to "fool with" the films they buy here. People who wanted to escape strict studio supervision find that they have to accept some discipline after all in order to get their work out.

The pressure begins long before the film is put up for distribution. Those who need initial backing are often told they must "cast up" (get a star or two) in order to pry loose the necessary money. Perhaps the best feature I saw at the festival was *Gods and Monsters*, which covers the last days of James Whale, the ultimately ostracized gay director who made the 1930s *Frankenstein* movies. The scriptwriter and director, Bill Condon, got an early commitment from the brilliant (and gay) British actor Ian McKellen to play Whale (who left England when he was thirty-four). But when Condon and his co-producer Gregg Fienberg went looking for money, they were told that McKellen is not box-office, so they would need some star in another role—or, if they could not get that, someone better known in the lead role. That flabbergasted Condon: "This is the role Ian was *born* to play." The backers started throwing names at the filmmakers for supporting roles. Luckily for Condon and Fienberg, none of the suggested actors was interested. The filmmakers bare-

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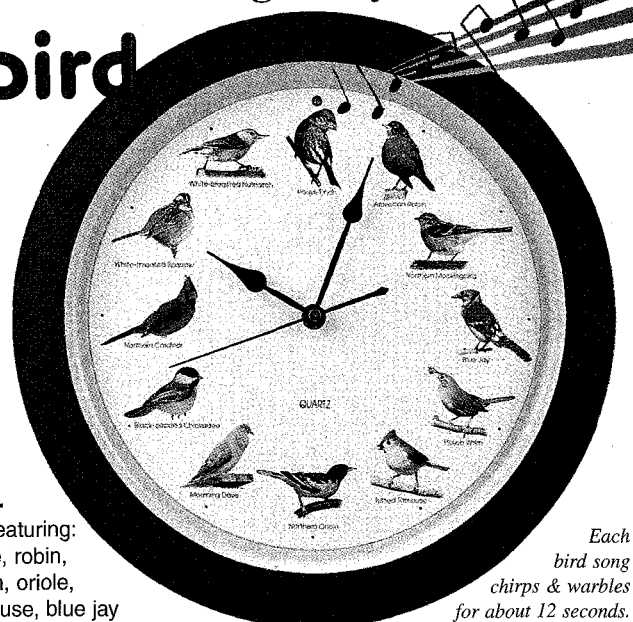
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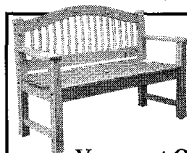
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ly squeezed by with the addition of Lynn Redgrave and Brendan Fraser to the cast. Fienberg says, "None of the people they suggested is very popular anymore, but Brendan has become hot since he appeared in *George of the Jungle*. We could have sold the film on his name alone if anyone could have foreseen that."

The film takes a knowledgeable look at Hollywood history. Lynn Redgrave plays McKellan's housekeeper as a growly equivalent to Igor of the Frankenstein movies. McKellan, in the role of the dying director, and Fraser, as his last hunk-infatuation, trade back and forth the roles of Frankenstein and his monster. The director alternately controls and is controlled by his vision. The film itself shows that real creativity can struggle through adversity, but only against great commercial pressures. And nobody here is a beginner. Condon has been making kitschy horror spoofs for almost two decades. Who could have guessed at the emotional depths his new movie reaches?

*Gods and Monsters* was not in either of the two categories that compete for prizes at Sundance—dramatic features and documentaries. Although the festival shows films that qualify as independent, some are high-budget ("Premieres"), foreign-made ("World Cinema"), or worthy efforts ("American Spectrum"—the category for *Gods and Monsters*). The high-budget premieres had one bomb (*The Misadventures of Margaret*, with the darling of the preceding year's festival, Parker Posey) and one beauty (*A Price Above Rubies*, about a woman trying to escape a Hasidic community).

At the panel on avant-garde films it was decided that Sundance is not an avant-garde festival. In fact, there was a great deal of debate over terms. "Independent" was criticized—the filmmakers here are obviously dependent on many people, and hoping to be dependent on more (distributors, exhibitors, publicists). "Low-budget" is not quite right anymore—nor, certainly, is "amateur." But the least likely terms are "radical," "underground," "guerrilla," and "avant-garde." In fact, few of the American entries were political or ideological in any conventional sense—though one

wouldn't know that from the jurors' awards. The top three prizes went to grim films—one about brutal fraternity hazing and two about blacks in jail. The judges clearly favored "serious" films that do not usually win the awards based on audience questionnaires passed out after each film. That tendency explains what gets into the competition in the first place. I asked Geoffrey Gilmore, the director of programming for the festival, why genre films are not usually admitted to competition. "The judges do not favor them," he said. "That's why we have few comedies as well." The comedies admitted this year had "redeeming" interest in gay or feminist problems—or, in the case of an animated fantasy, an innovative theme.

Political themes were common enough in the foreign entries, but American films reflected the apolitical concentration on private lives that shows up elsewhere in today's cultural life. Dysfunctional families were a favorite subject. The programming director joked that his nickname the year before had been "Dysfunctional Gilmore." This year, he pointed out, tension between brothers showed up often, but in films that were subsumable in other categories.

**H**ERE are the most common themes for this year:

1. *Pa Hit Ma*. Recent sociological literature has stressed the importance of having a father in the home. These movies make that sound about as desirable as filling your house with high explosives. At least eight films had abusive fathers at their core—including a documentary on homeless fans of punk rock, *The Decline*

*of Western Civilization, Part III*. When its director, Penelope Spheeris, asked these young people why they left home, almost all said they were fleeing or thrown out by an abusive father. The Paul Schrader film *Affliction* had Nick Nolte

as a man repeating the dreary cycle of his father's abusiveness. The director of *Buffalo 66* told a press conference that he made the film to get revenge on his father (played as a lecherous moron by Ben Gazzara). One of the best films on the program (and the winner of an audience award) was *Smoke Signals*, written by the



**Gods and Monsters**



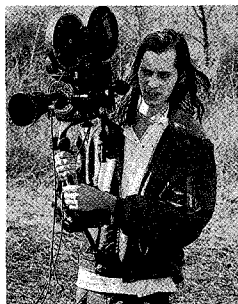
Native American novelist Sherman Alexie, which tells of a son's coming to terms with the drunken outrages of his father on the Salmon Indian Reservation.

2. *Working on the Relationship*. This asks the pressing question of our time: Can this nonmarriage be saved? (Sometimes, but not often, an actual marriage is at stake.) The director of *The Real Blonde*, a sex farce, said of his film that it shows how hard his lead characters (played by Matthew Modine and Catherine Keener) try to keep their relationship. A quest for at least quasi-fidelity in a world of shifting partnerships is seen as especially noble or hopeful in some of these films, none of them very impressive. The horrible *Misadventures* of Parker Posey used this theme, and the blighted *Great Expectations*, shown at a "special screening," reduced Dickens to fit the pattern.

3. *Am I Gay?* The coming out of gays has led some people to reassess friendships and associations—does knowing or liking gays make one gay? That was a common question, and it cropped up even in my favorite movie of the festival, *Gods and Monsters*, in which the Brendan Fraser character fears that liking Ian McKellan will mean that he is gay. At the other end of the excellence scale *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss* has a gay jerk agonizing endlessly over whether a hunk he pines for is gay (the answer is obvious to everyone but the jerk).

In *The Opposite of Sex*—which does a funny spoof of the cynical voice-over, channeling it through a bratty sexpot (Christina Ricci, who was this year's Parker Posey in terms of popularity)—a gay man's half-sister desires her brother's lover, making her feel she may be incestuous. Another good comedy, *How to Make the Cruelest Month*, has a smart-aleck young girl sign up for a session with a lesbian tester of others' GQ (gay quotient). In *High Art* a lesbian played by Ally Sheedy reverses the terms of the problem, asking herself "Am I straight?"—with a funny reversal of family disapproval, since her mother (wackily played by Tammy Grimes) has become a model of tolerance by championing her lesbian daughter.

**T**HOUGH the films at Sundance are not amateur, they do have the mark of the beginner on them. Like many first novels, the movies were autobiographical. But film, even more than books, encourages exhibitionism. Some of the shows were merely excuses to let the writer-director do a spiritual or (in two cases) a literal striptease. Jimmy Smallhorne told audiences that in his film *2by4*, one of three about Irish communities, he was revealing the inner anguish of his countrymen, who are too often portrayed as happy-go-lucky. But he devoted the tale to scenes of himself nude, his singing performances, and his self-adoration.



John Waters, 1972

In *Some Nudity Required*, Odette Springer, another aspiring singer, purported to tell of her disgust at working for the exploitative filmmaker Roger Corman, but managed to fill the time with her own songs and scenes of herself nude. In *Buffalo 66* the self-designated "rock star" out for revenge on his father showed mainly his own perspiring and hyperventilation. His message was the same as that given by one of the punk rockers in *The Decline of Western Civilization*: his parents were angry at him because he was smarter than they. Though the very youngest writer-directors here tended to be in their late twenties, a lot of adolescent angst was being recycled. The loss of a political interest outside private life seems to be leading to an implosion of the self, in these movies as in the society around us.

The audience that seemed to be most uncomplicatedly enjoying itself attended the first showing of *Divine Trash*, a documentary on the making, twenty-five years ago, of John Waters's *Pink Flamingos*. The appeal may have come from the fact that this film recorded a real-life instance of "Hey kids, let's put on a show!" The props budget for Waters's movie was \$200, of which \$100 went for an old house trailer that fell apart while being dragged to the shoot. The maker of *Divine Trash*, Steve Yeager, was working for a Baltimore television station when *Pink Flamingos* was in production, and he shot five hours of the often hilarious travails of Waters and his crew. The house trailer had to be reassembled around wooden scaffolding—which caught fire so energetically

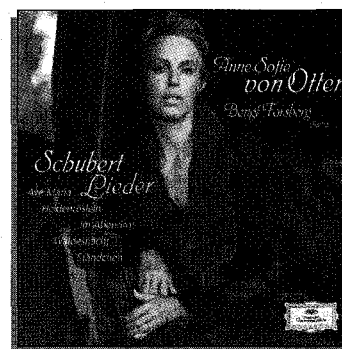
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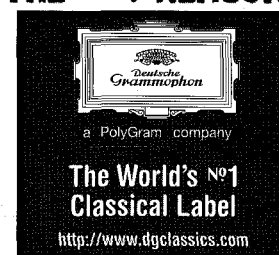
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## "Land for Peace"

### Can it solve the problems of the Middle East?

There has been much emphasis for years on the "land for peace" formula to solve the long-simmering problems of the Middle East. Translating this slogan into plain English means that Israel should surrender Judea-Samaria (the "West Bank"), Gaza and the Golan to the Arabs. They would establish a Palestinian state. Once that happened, it is thought that peace and tranquility would soon come to the troubled Middle East.

### What are the facts?

■ The concept of "land for peace" is a totally new one in the history of the world. It was formulated for one purpose only, namely to pressure Israel to give up territories that it has administered since the Six-Day War of 1967. By its victory in that war, Israel wound up in possession of these territories. Contrary to what many are led to believe, the "West Bank", the focus of today's attention, had never been part of any Arab country. It was part of Palestine, a territorial unit that, by the Mandate of the League of Nations and in line with the Balfour Declaration, had been designated as a national home for the Jewish people.

■ Thus, while the concept of "land for peace" is a brand-new one, the concept that to the victor belong the spoils is as old as history itself and had really never been questioned before. Our own country, of course, following its Manifest Destiny, has benefited greatly and has consolidated its territory by applying this motto. But Israel followed a different path. From the day of victory in 1967, it waited for an offer of peace from the Arabs. But that offer never came. Instead, following the war, The Arabs pronounced their three unalterable "nos": no recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel.

■ In 1977, President Sadat of Egypt traveled to Jerusalem and presented a peace plan. The Israelis eagerly embraced his suggestion. In exchange for peace and normalization of relations, Israel returned to Egypt the vast Sinai peninsula, together with the city of Yamit; some of the most advanced military installations in the world; the port and naval installations of Sharm-el-

Sheik, which safeguards Israel's access to its port of Eilat; and the oil fields Israel had developed and which had made Israel self-sufficient in its energy requirements. And, of course, Israel also gave up the natural buffer against aggression that the Suez Canal and the strategic depth of the Sinai itself provided. It was a first in history. Never before in the chronicle of mankind had the victor returned conquered territory to the vanquished in order to attain peace.

■ One would expect that the concept of "land for peace" would work both ways. After all, should not the Arabs also make some territorial sacrifices for peace? Unfortunately, that is not the case. Every inch of land held by the Arabs is considered "holy Arab soil" and its possession by the "infidels" is inadmissible, intolerable, a blasphemy and a case for "jihad" (holy war). No compromise, no concession is ever possible. Sale of land to Jews is punishable by death. As far as the Arabs are concerned the "land for peace" principle is basically a one-way street.

■ The "land for peace" formulation is now mostly applied to Judea-Samaria (the "West Bank"), Gaza and the Golan Heights. Israel's foes, but also some of its friends, urge Israel to yield these regions to the Arabs in exchange for "peace." But there is no peace, and no peace will come about by Israel's giving up these areas of vital strategic importance to those who are its sworn enemies and who have declared over and over again that they wish to use this land as their launching pad for the final attempt at the destruction of Israel. The conflict in the area is not only between Israel and the "Palestinians." It is first of all between Israel and the hostile Arab nations. With the exception of Egypt, and now also of Jordan, virtually all of them are still in a state of war with Israel.

To none of the Arab countries has it ever occurred that they might trade land for peace—as, for instance, yielding the "West Bank", Gaza or the Golan to Israel for the sake of peace and tranquility. Egypt certainly made no territorial or other concessions for the sake of peace and neither did Jordan. Both countries drove very hard bargains to which the Israelis, in their unending quest for peace, acceded. There is never any accommodation on the part of the Arabs, never even a gesture of tentative friendship. For the victor to yield land for peace to the vanquished is a new idea—who knows, it might even be a good one. But it surely would have to work both ways in order to be valid and effective.

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cally in the climactic torching scene that it threatened to burn down the surrounding woods. The dogshit-eating scene was made difficult by an unresponsive dog (it finally had to be given an enema and then rapidly steered to its mark).

Yeager paces his use of old footage with interviews. There actually was a makeup man for *Pink Flamingos*, and he came up with the idea of shaving the transvestite Divine's hair back to give "her" the iconic high forehead of her publicity shots for the movie. Yeager even manages to give a fleeting history of underground films as he interviews those who influenced Waters or were influenced by him. These interviews—and clips from different works by Waters and others—make a good case that *Pink Flamingos* was the most important as well as the most successful underground film of its day. Waters created a mythic Baltimore of lovable oddballs that manages to be scathing and satirical without the slightest hint of meanspiritedness. Even Mary Avara, the implacable Maryland censor who crusaded against Waters, is treated as a kind of comic aunt in the attic. Interviews with Waters convey the weird innocence under his cult of the disgusting—as when he says that the ideal audience for *Pink Flamingos* would be a kindergarten class. This is less a case of adolescent angst than of a child's mental omnivorousness.

Can such chewing-gum-and-string confections be made in the future? If so, there seems little prospect of seeing them at Sundance, where the scramble for big-time distribution leads to a frenzy of "casting up," budget creep, and expensive publicity. But just as the Edinburgh Festival created a fringe that was (for a while) more creative than the main event, Sundance has spawned its own fringe events—first Slamdance, then Slamdunk. The latter program showed a documentary, *Kurt and Courtney*, that was banned at Sundance because of contested rights to Kurt Cobain songs. This film, which was made by the commercially successful documentarian Nick Broomfield (*Heidi Fleiss: Hollywood Madam*), drew attention to the unofficial goings-on at Park City. Perhaps the fringe is where the next creative oddball will appear—sans stars, sans dough, sans anything but a myth like the Baltimore that existed only in John Waters's brain. ☞



## America Right and Left

*Political intellectuals of both parties call for something more bracing than Bill Clinton's flabby syncretism—and think we want it too*

by Nicholas Lemann

**RONALD REAGAN:  
How an Ordinary Man  
Became an Extraordinary  
Leader**

by Dinesh D'Souza.  
*The Free Press*, 292 pages,  
\$25.00.

**THE NEW MAJORITY:  
Toward a Popular  
Progressive Politics**

edited by Stanley B. Greenberg and  
Theda Skocpol.  
*Yale University Press*,  
333 pages, \$30.00.

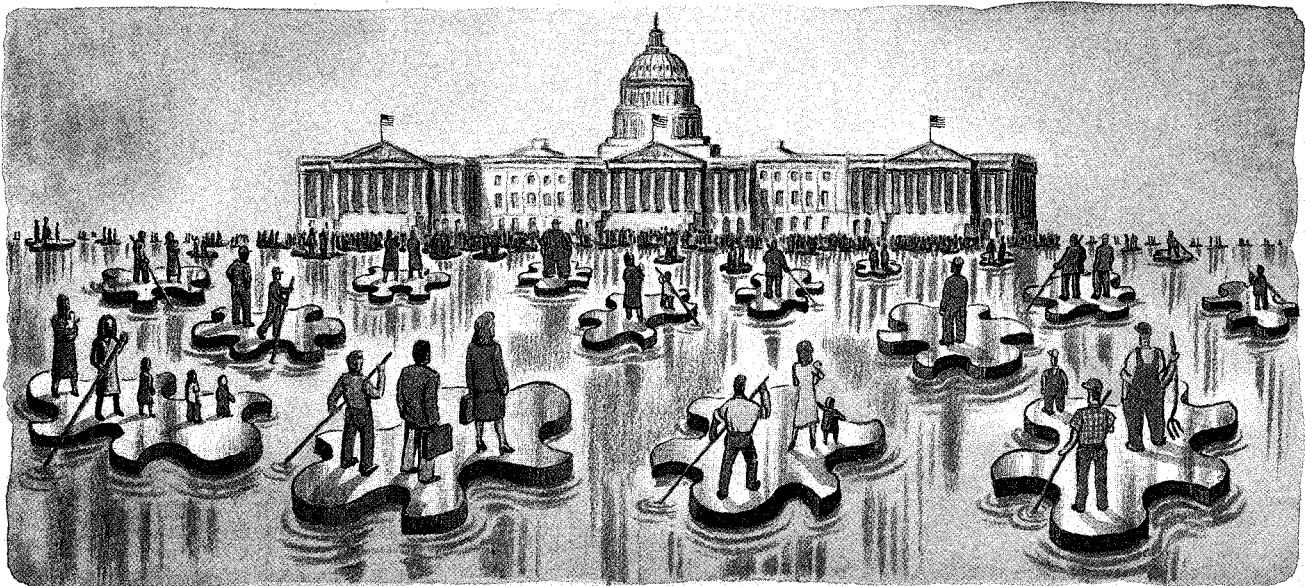
**T**HESE are both movement books, but from opposite movements. Dinesh D'Souza has been a prominent member of the conservative movement ever since his undergraduate days as editor of *The Dartmouth Review*. He worked in the Reagan White House. Stanley Greenberg was President Bill Clin-

ton's lead pollster in the 1992 campaign, and he and the sociologist Theda Skocpol are the founders of a loose group of intellectuals and political strategists who want to tug the Democratic Party further to the left. Therefore it is interesting that the two books have some points of agreement.

Both are nostalgic and gloomy. D'Souza misses the great days of Ronald Reagan's presidency ("I like to think of him . . . a lone horseman silhouetted against an open sky") and finds that "the Republican party and the conservative intellectual movement are now aimless and frustrated." In his essay in *The New Majority* the sociologist Paul Starr says the Democrats "do not have a believable narrative of the future that explains how and why they can become the majority party again," as they were from 1932 to 1968. The two books agree that Reagan remade American politics, especially presidential politics, by persuading a large part of blue-collar America to de-

fect from the Democrats. Both find it frustrating that domestic policymaking since Reagan has been preoccupied with promoting economic prosperity through deficit reduction.

Part of the explanation for this assonance is that we seem to be in a centrist period in American politics—so naturally the wings are unhappy. There is no crisply defined, ascendant ideology sweeping all before it, and as politics takes the form of a series of inelegant compromises, it declines in importance in the consciousness of the country. Another clue to the source of the books' unexpected commonality is that both are almost stridently anti-intellectual (though written, of course, mostly by intellectuals and professors). The main motif of D'Souza's book is a constant counterposition of Ronald Reagan against "elites," "pundits," "intellectuals," "experts," "wise men," and "critics." Whenever members of any of these groups are brought onstage in his book, you



can be sure it is to serve as a foil for his hero. The authors assembled by Greenberg and Skocpol aren't as single-minded, but every one of the scattered mentions of elites, experts, and policy wonks in the essays that compose *The New Majority* is pejorative.

Greenberg and Skocpol's introduction mentions in passing that Clinton and the Republican leaders of Congress are moving toward "a 'bipartisan' elite agenda." From their point of view, and also D'Souza's, that is the real problem. Both books dream of a populist American politics. (They would lay bets differently on how a populist politics would turn out.) But we are living in a low-inflation investors' paradise where ordinary people seem—to these authors, at least—more palliated than represented by Washington.

It is amazing how quickly this placid political situation has developed. Only ten years ago, when George Bush and Michael Dukakis were running for President, it looked as if Reagan had engineered a permanent conservative triumph under the terms of which any politician who publicly associated himself with the word "liberal" or displayed any attitude toward federal taxation except stacy horror would be instantly obliterated, as if by a death ray. Six years ago, when Clinton won by painting the Republicans as rich people insensitive to the suffering of the middle class during a recession, the hope among the eventual contributors to *The New Majority* was that the tide had turned and a time of the left rising had begun. Four years ago the conservative landslide in the 1994 elections, which was the event that led Greenberg and Skocpol to form their group, seemed to foreshadow the death of the Democratic Party itself. What all these gyrations had in common was that—rhetorically, at least—the winning formula was the anti-elitist one. Now, unaccountably, the ideological forces are in balance, and Clinton does not shy from endorsing unpopular policies that the establishment likes, such as entitlement reform, military engagement in Bosnia, affirmative action, and free trade.

The politics of this moment is substantially the work of a man lurking beneath the surface of both these books but never mentioned in either—Dick Morris, the strategist of Clinton's rescue between

the 1994 and 1996 elections. Two things about Morris greatly aided the rise of Greenberg and Skocpol's "'bipartisan' elite agenda": first, he is a Democrat-turned-Republican-turned-Democrat, and so not one to promote ideological purity; and second, he believes in very heavy television advertising as the crucial political technique. Morris's huge, more-than-a-year-long ad buy for Clinton had to be paid for, which meant that Clinton could not afford to offend Democratic individuals or interest groups who had a lot of money. So Morris polled and tested and found popular, consensual causes for Clinton to emphasize, such as promoting family togetherness and preserving the beauty of the West, rather than leading him toward a Reaganlike grouping of his portion of the country on one side of a clearly drawn line.

There is no reason why the Morris polity should last longer than its recent predecessors. These books provide an occasion for looking at alternative polities proposed by one element of the right and one element of the left, and for wondering how good a chance either would have to rise to a dominant position.

**D**'SOUZA'S book could be used to illustrate the proposition that biographies come to resemble their subjects. It is jaunty, spirited, not too hardworking, prone to indignant misrepresentations of the positions of political opponents, unable to resist thinking of public life as a series of instructive myths and fables, and finally, somehow, impossible to dislike. Evidently, a true historical work about Reagan—with extensive primary research that leads to considered judgments—is still in the future. D'Souza has done some interviewing, but for the most part his book is written from contemporary journalistic sources and has the feeling of a partisan's brief for Reagan. The now slightly forgotten battles of the 1980s—supply-side economics, Star Wars, contra aid—reappear in pretty much their original form, rather than being reconsidered in some way that would prevent the arguments over them from sounding familiar.

When Reagan was President, his staff, like all White House staffs, would concede not one point to the opposition: the boss was right in every case. D'Souza's book represents a second line of defense,

in that it is now safe to concede the truly unwinnable points, as a way of strengthening the overall argument for Reagan. So it's interesting to see where D'Souza is intractable and where he isn't. He freely admits, for example, that Reagan is incapable of personal intimacy, except perhaps with his wife; the only close friend he ever had, the movie actor Robert Taylor, has been dead for almost thirty years. D'Souza also doesn't bother to deny that Nancy Reagan, as First Lady, was "a socialite whose main concern was with the world of movies and high fashion."

D'Souza mounts a pro forma defense of Reagan's performance on tax and budget issues. He makes various tendentious claims that will be familiar to readers of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, such as that under Reagan the federal deficit did not grow significantly as a percentage of the gross national product, and that tax receipts from the rich increased, and that Reagan would have cut spending more if Congress had let him. D'Souza's true attitude, however (which was perhaps Reagan's, too), is Who cares?—"The American public's relatively cavalier view of the deficit as a jumble of big, meaningless numbers proved to be a fairly accurate appraisal of the significance of the issue." The same goes for the increase in economic inequality during the 1980s, which, D'Souza argues, popped up in economic statistics mostly because "a substantial number of middle-class Americans became rich." D'Souza doesn't seem to feel that he has to portray Reagan as fiscally prudent or vitally concerned with the economic situation of working people in order to make the sale.

D'Souza makes his big stand for Reagan's performance in defense and foreign policy. While Reagan was President, it wasn't possible to argue that he had ended the Cold War and brought down the Soviet empire; these things hadn't happened yet. Now D'Souza presents them as the centerpiece of Reagan's historic achievement, which is interesting in that it requires attributing to Reagan a view he never quite embraced publicly—that the Soviet Union could be brought down. D'Souza's proof does not meet the standards of a professional historian—he doesn't offer a single document. But he is enough of an



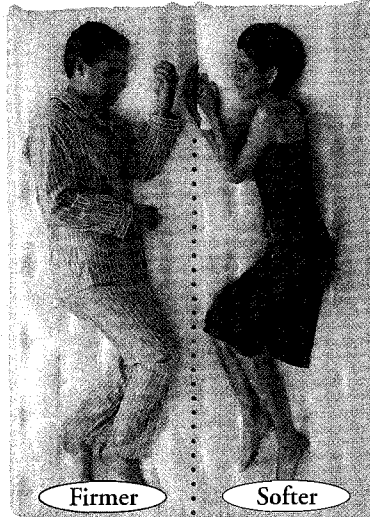
insider that it is worth heeding his assumption that this was what Reagan was doing all along.

It is also interesting that the chief means of destroying the Soviets, according to D'Souza, was very high defense spending that would force them into economic chaos as they tried to keep pace. When Reagan was in office, nobody in his Administration would admit on the record that he was spending on defense just to put pressure on the Soviet economy rather than to meet any specific strategic need. Now D'Souza tells us that that was exactly what was going on: "Senior officials like George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger confirmed to me that Reagan had a conscious strategy to impose intolerable strains on the Soviet regime, perhaps bankrupting it altogether." Moreover, D'Souza says, Reagan quietly abandoned his stated goal of shrinking the federal government, because breaking the Soviet Union through defense spending was so important to him: "Reagan reconciled himself to presiding over a large federal government as the price worth paying for his defense policy."

In mining D'Souza's book for policy nuggets, I'm in danger of conveying the wrong impression of it. Its main note isn't argumentative, it's emotional. D'Souza loves Reagan. Not only that, the question of whether something like Reaganism can be revived in American politics can better be answered by looking at D'Souza's feelings than by looking at his thoughts. Reaganism in the policy sense would be quite difficult to practice today, because the Cold War is over and it would be tough to sell the idea of enormous tax cuts after we have devoted so many years and so much effort to deficit reduction. Reaganism as a cultural stance, however, could still be quite potent politically.

The exhilaration of not having to care about the good opinion of the centrist-liberal establishment seems to be the essence of Reagan's appeal to D'Souza, and surely it was to millions of other people as well. It's amazing, in retrospect, what a long string of Presidents—from Truman all the way to Carter—felt a twinge of terror at the possibility of, to put it in shorthand, incurring the disapproval of Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Reagan couldn't have cared less. It is with a

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feeling of throwing off the shackles that D'Souza reports on Reagan's reading the comics more closely than the news in his daily paper; telling jokes in dialect about minorities and homosexuals; proudly announcing that his favorite magazine was *Human Events*, which is so conservative that even conservatives don't usually read it; and regaling the head of the Soviet Union with a précis of an article he had read in *People* magazine about a really, really fat guy who got stuck in a doorway. ("Reagan was perhaps the wittiest occupant of the White House in American history," D'Souza writes.)

Conversely, D'Souza depicts as creepy and disgusting the distant liberal world that despises Reagan. President Clinton, for example, is "appallingly arrogant" by Reagan's standards for sometimes reading state papers while dressed informally. As Reagan himself did, D'Souza damns the other side with stirring, apocryphal-sounding, hard-to-untangle anecdotes like this one:

At the leftist Institute for Policy Studies, the research fellows shared the story of Nora Astorga, the Sandinista beauty who had lured one of Somoza's top generals into her bedroom, only to have him castrated and then murdered by guerrillas concealed behind the drapes. As the incident was recounted to me, the policy analysts present confessed that they had all studied the rhetoric of revolution, but confronted with the real thing, their only reaction was, "Wow."

D'Souza is right in saying that Reagan completely remade American presidential politics. Reagan didn't even officially become a Republican until 1962, when he was more than fifty years old. At that point the party looked like a spent force. When he left office, it appeared unbeatable in presidential elections. He made primary in national politics issues that had not been before, such as taxes and abortion, and moved the debate on virtually everything distinctly to the right. He altered the Republican coalition as fundamentally as FDR had altered the Democratic. As D'Souza puts it,

While the GOP had previously been the party of business, Reagan helped to make it the party of taxpayers and religious believers, with its base in

the South and West. His tough stance in foreign policy and his advocacy of traditional values won the support of many blue-collar ethnics, the so-called Reagan Democrats.

The way Reagan did all this was by finding what D'Souza aptly calls "the common ground between conservatism and populism."

Today, D'Souza says, "the right seems to be returning to the fever swamps from which it first arose." He can't think of a solution to the problem more plausible than this: "We simply need to ask in every situation that arises, What would Reagan have done?" His book, though, offers clues to a much better way for the Republicans to get back their touch than holding séances and channeling Reagan's spirit. The key would be hitting the anti-elitist note as consistently and effectively as he did.

**A**NOTHER thing Reagan remade was the standard political-science view that in American politics ideology is unimportant, because the center always wins. Still, politicians are different from intellectuals: even a politician who comes through as being as clear and strong as Reagan almost never has a perfectly coherent and loyally followed set of views. That's why, as D'Souza reminds us, the intellectual right spent much of the Reagan Administration being furious at the most congenial President it will ever have.

Greenberg and Skocpol and their fellow contributors are thinkers much more than politicians. Therefore they represent a worked-out system of belief in a way that Reagan did not. To call the *New Majority* group the left wing of the Democratic Party is only minimally useful, though, because the divisions in the party are more complicated than left versus right.

After Lyndon Johnson retired, the Democrats split into groups better understood in terms of interests than of ideology. One was a loose coalition of blacks, Hispanics, feminists, environmentalists, and urban interests; another was vestigially loyal southerners and non-Republican business interests; still another was organized labor. As these groups muddled along, making messy, unsatisfying deals with one another, the Democrats kept losing presidential elec-



tions. For twenty-five years or more, rival groups of party intellectuals have been trying to come up with a Democratic creed that voters would find vivid and appealing. The Democratic Leadership Council, for example, with which Bill Clinton affiliated himself during his rise in the 1980s, is the intellectual department of the party's southern-and-business wing.

The Greenberg-Skocpol circle would be most comfortable with the labor interest group. Most of the contributors to *The New Majority* are people who have over the years been pushing for the Democratic Party to become more like a Western European social-democratic party, with blue-collar workers its voting base and economic issues its central cause. They tend to be frustrated that the Democrats have so often veered off into a racial or cultural liberalism that alienates working-class voters; the party, in their view, needs to find policies that put the emphasis back on class and economics. A key text for the social democrats is *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), by the sociologist William Julius Wilson, who is best known for *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), about the urban underclass. Wilson argued that class disparities are more important than racial ones, and that they work far better as a political organizing principle; any reform effort labeled as being for the black and the poor is bound to fail, because it will lack a powerful constituency to support it.

The high-water mark of the social democrats was probably the first year of the Clinton Administration. With Greenberg as his chief pollster and Wilson as a trusted informal adviser, Clinton signed on to the social democrats' idea that the Democratic Party should propose not explicit anti-poverty programs but wide-spectrum initiatives that would help the very poor while being billed as support for ordinary working people. Chief among these was the health-care-reform plan (Paul Starr, quoted above, had a hand in formulating it). When this failed, the social democrats began to lose influence; pollsters brought in by Dick Morris replaced Greenberg during the 1996 campaign.

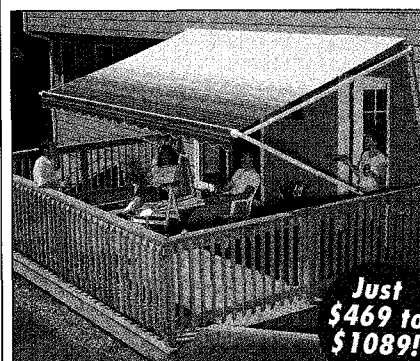
Conceptually, the social democrats have had two main problems to wrestle with. First, Americans are persistently

reluctant to think in terms of class: this is the country where origins aren't supposed to matter and anybody can make himself into anything. Even when people are willing to apply the word "class" to themselves, the preferred modifier is "middle," which sounds vaguely Republican, rather than "working." Race never seems to go away as an issue. As strong as populist sentiment is in this country, it seems, oddly enough, usually to be directed not against people who have a lot of money but rather against a culturally defined elite.

The social democrats' second problem is that in their model of governance putting together a majority coalition of working people is the first task, and meeting specific problems is the second. A program is appealing to them more because it will attract voters to the party than because it will fill a public-policy need. The social democrats' model of a successful government program is Social Security, which is lavishly and repeatedly praised in *The New Majority*: because all elderly people rather than just the needy are eligible, it is very big and politically unassailable. After the 1994 elections Newt Gingrich's forces were able to eliminate the federal welfare program entirely, but their tentative exploration of reductions in Medicare spending led to their fall from pre-eminence in Washington. The trouble with the social-democratic approach is that it leads to an almost blind defense of the big entitlement programs. In their chapter in *The New Majority*, Theodore Marmor, a political scientist, and Jerry Mashaw, a law professor, insist that Social Security needs only "modest adjustments" in order to avoid a spot of "mild trouble" thirty-five years from now. But they propose changes as major as transferring 40 percent of the trust funds into the stock market, which makes one wonder how mild the coming trouble really is.

**T**HE news in *The New Majority* is that the group is working toward a new solution to the first of these problems, by emphasizing family issues instead of class ones. In Greenberg and Skocpol's introduction improved versions of the traditional social-democratic terminology appear. The core constituency sought by the Democratic Party

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is the “working middle class,” instead of the working class; alternatively, its members are “working Americans of regular luck and ordinary prospects,” which is a way of conceding that they probably share the dream of opportunity even if they haven’t much benefited from it personally. In her own chapter in *The New Majority*, Skocpol rejects “an overtly working class-oriented populism” in favor of putting “working parents at the center of the new family politics.” Greenberg, in his chapter, calls on the Democrats to tell “a progressive story” about “the loneliness and heroism of the family and the social support that makes it possible for families to succeed,” rather than “a populist, antibusiness story.”

Greenberg and Skocpol’s rejection of class-based politics is a bow to reality. Their hopeful embrace of family-based politics seems to come partly from having looked at 1996 polling results and seen how amazingly female the Democratic Party has become—Clinton carried single women by more than 30 points. Dick Morris also struck the family note in 1996, but mostly by proposing small, symbolic initiatives, such as permitting public schools to make their students wear uniforms. Clinton’s main policy commitment during Morris’s heyday as an adviser was a centrist one that horrified the social democrats—balancing the budget over seven years. Greenberg and Skocpol would start from the family premise and try to build a truly ambitious social program that would include greatly expanded health benefits and child support. They surely must be pleased with Clinton’s recent proposals to make Medicare available to certain people fifty-five or over who have lost their health insurance, and to subsidize child care through tax breaks.

Another theme running through *The New Majority* is reverence for political organization as the best way of giving working people a strong voice in government. Over the years, as Margaret Weir, a political scientist, and Marshall Ganz, a former professional organizer, write disapprovingly in their chapter, “political parties have ceased to be mass-based political organizations—becoming instead national (and international) fund-raising organizations.” The effect of this has been to make rich people,

who can pay for television advertising, more influential within the Democratic Party than they used to be; it’s no accident that the Democrats have moved to the right on economic issues. Most of the supposedly grassroots left-wing groups that arose within the party during the 1960s and 1970s relied on new techniques of public-opinion molding, such as direct mail and phone banks, so they, too, contributed to the diminution in the importance of organizing.

It has been the Christian Coalition and other conservative groups that have become true national membership organizations. As a result, the members of conservative organizations are involved and energized, and the members of liberal ones are unconnected to active politics. The left, Weir and Ganz imply, puts too much faith in campaign-finance reform as a magic solution to the problems of American politics: “Getting money out of politics is important, but getting people back in is more important.”

I don’t mean to make *The New Majority* sound like the work of a tightly disciplined political movement. As a whole, it has an interestingly loose, suggestive feeling, because several of the essays don’t quite fit with the Greenberg-Skocpol message. Alan Brinkley, a historian, contributes a criticism of the Democrats’ shift in emphasis from public investment to consumer welfare, but the tenor of the rest of the book is that the highest purpose of government is to send people checks in the mail. Michael Sandel, a social theorist, calls for a renewal of civic life in a way that makes it sound small, local, and voluntary, whereas Skocpol’s vision of civic renewal would bring back old-fashioned political machines to make claims on the national government in behalf of working people. Michael Dawson, a political scientist, calls for a class-based pitch of just the kind that Greenberg and Skocpol think won’t sell politically. Weir and Ganz criticize organizations on the left for seeking foundation funding that carries with it a prohibition on political activity, but Karen Paget, another political scientist, calls for greater foundation involvement. William Julius Wilson is less determinedly nonracial than he was twenty years ago. The whole book, in fact, doesn’t quite know how Democrats should handle the race issue,

which is a tribute to the authors’ honesty about the prospects of race’s being successfully subsumed under broader economic concerns.

**B**UT there is enough coherence here to make it worthwhile to wonder whether Greenberg, Skocpol, and their co-authors are onto a potentially winning new political formula. *The New Majority* doesn’t concern itself with specific politicians (except, in passing and ruefully, Clinton), so it leaves unanswered the question of who would give voice to its views in the next presidential election. Richard Gephardt seems too much the old-fashioned labor populist, Al Gore too close to the southern-and-business wing of the party. There are, however, a couple of interesting essays proposing plausible electoral strategies. Paul Starr argues that Hispanics, the fastest-growing ethnic group, can be courted successfully in a way that will cause California and Texas to become reliably Democratic again. Ira Katznelson, a political scientist, makes a convincing (because cautiously presented) case that the South, although essentially conservative, need not vote as heavily Republican as it has voted in most recent national elections.

The idea that there is a slumbering Democratic majority out there that might be stirred awake is not the tough part of the sell. D’Souza, for instance, would freely acknowledge it. What will be harder is finding the animating idea to do the job. The contributors to *The New Majority* usually refer to themselves and like-minded Americans as “progressives,” a code word used to avoid “the left” or “democratic socialists” or “liberals.” Their kind of progressive is different from the Progressives of the early twentieth century—in fact, they are almost opposite. The original Progressives believed that experts could rationally assess the country’s problems and then solve them in a neutral, practical, nonpolitical way. The Greenberg-Skocpol progressives want to put working-class, interest-based politics back in government and get the experts out. They most definitely do not believe in a neat, tidy government that crisply handles tasks as they arise, keeping the accounts in balance, helping individuals mainly by educating them rather than by sending them money, and giving aid



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These days most public political discourse takes place within the psychological parameters of the educated, affluent elite (as was also the case during the Progressive Era). Poll questions are asked, ads are scripted, evening news shows produced, from inside an elite mind. Greenberg and Skocpol would probably say that if we believe that the American people want deficit reduction, entitlement reform, and a practical, problem-solving government, it is because we are prisoners of the narrowness of the discourse. For their program to be a potential political winner, they have to be right that all these ideas are much less popular than press accounts make them out to be.

It is definitely the case that the budget-balancing, inflation-reducing, socially tolerant elite is unpopular—D'Souza reminds us of that quite effectively. The question is why. Is the elite's problem its individualist market ideology (in which case the larger public would be receptive to the views in *The New Majority*) or its secular, knowing, sophisticated cultural stance (in which case the right could rise again)?

Even though D'Souza has been associated with a much more successful political movement than have the contributors to *The New Majority*, the temptation to count the Greenberg-Skocpol group out as a bunch of Cambridge-residing naifs ought to be resisted, because they are holding a trump card. The Republican Party did a brilliant job of making "government" a negative word for political purposes, but the truth is that government is popular. As D'Souza admits, Reagan didn't heavily cut government, and hence ran up big deficits, precisely because most people like such expensive programs as Social Security and Medicare. Skocpol's work elsewhere has demonstrated that the federal government has been running substantial, popular benefits programs for more than a century. The Republicans have had to keep attention focused on the elite that runs the government because their position on the thing itself is not a clear winner. That's a tough job to do forever. If the Democrats can figure out a way not to seem elitist—Greenberg and Skocpol's way, or some other way—they'll be in a better position to give the American people what they want from politics. ☸

# The Horror

by David M. Kennedy

## THE RAPE OF NANKING: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II

by Iris Chang. Basic Books,  
290 pages, \$25.00.

"ATROCITIES follow war as the jackal follows a wounded beast," John W. Dower wrote in his history of the Second World War in the Pacific, *War Without Mercy* (1986). Bestiality slunk along as the ghoulish companion of all the armies in that war, Allied and Axis alike, notoriously in the Nazi-Soviet war, and most hideously in Hitler's campaign of systematic genocide. The Holocaust has become our era's ghastly icon of humankind's capacity for fiendishness. The memory of it quivers in the world's imagination, chastening the certainties of philosophers, challenging the pieties of churches, shadowing art and literature, chilling the souls of all who contemplate it. More than half a century later, recollections of the Holocaust also dictate the policies of governments and even shape relations among nations. Indeed, contemporary discourse about the Holocaust epitomizes the modern urge to master the politics of atrocities, an enterprise that has come to rival in scope and intensity an older cultural project that sought to fathom and perhaps to quell man's dreadful instinct to play the wolf to man. In our time the effort to control the politics of suffering may even be displacing the effort to understand the psychology of evil.

Iris Chang's subtitle signals her intention to assimilate the war in Asia to the war in Europe, and to claim for the Chinese victims of the Imperial Japanese Army's sadism the same recognition that history affords to victims of the Holocaust. To be sure, the grisly record of what happened in Nanjing following the Japanese conquest of the city in December, 1937, prodigiously confirms Dower's dictum. But whether the events in Nanjing deserve to be compared to the Holocaust is perhaps another matter. Nor is it clear that those events have been so

thoroughly forgotten as Chang asserts.

Japan's campaign of aggression against China began with the seizure of Manchuria in 1931. The Manchurian takeover elicited Chinese reprisals against Japanese nationals in Shanghai, including the murder by a mob of a Japanese Buddhist monk, which in turn prompted an armed Japanese intervention in that city. A vicious but localized Sino-Japanese war raged around the Shanghai region through much of 1932. The conflict then settled into a quiescent phase for several years. Japan proceeded to consolidate its hold on Manchuria, while China was distracted by simmering civil war between Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists and Mao Zedong's Communists. Preoccupied with the Great Depression and the rising menace of Hitler, the Western world bore distant and largely helpless witness to the sputtering crisis in Asia.

A minor clash between Chinese and Japanese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge, near Beijing, touched off full-scale war between the two Asian powers in July of 1937. Japan and China were both by then spoiling for the fight. Open war offered an opportunity once and for all to chastise what Tokyo regarded as the exasperatingly feckless Chinese regime. In Japanese eyes, a British diplomat reported,

China is not a civilized state, but a chaotic amorphous mass whose government is powerless to maintain order. Communism is rampant there, and the country is prey to the depredation of the armies of rival war lords, red communist armies and roving bodies of bandits.

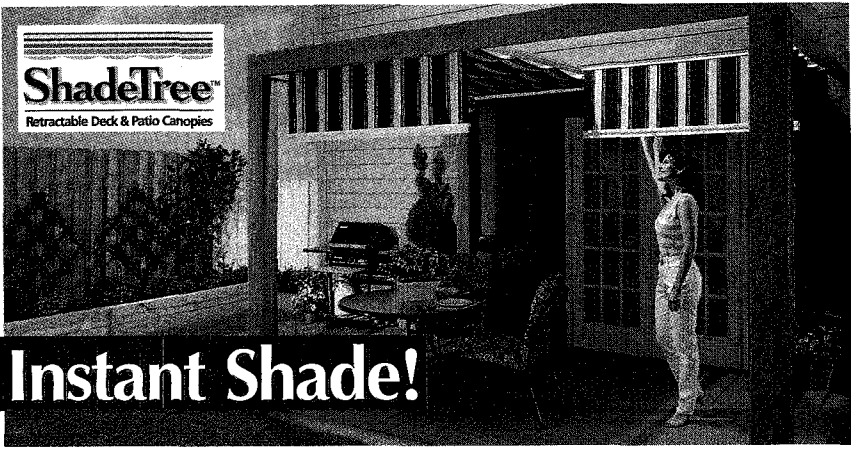
For his part, Chiang, under pressure from his generals and the Communists, ravened for the chance to come to grips with the Japanese aggressor in a decisive showdown. Soon foiled, however, in his attempt to engage the main body of Japanese troops near Beijing, Chiang sought to shift the arena of combat to the south by replaying the scenario of 1932. His minions menaced the 30,000 Japanese residents of Shanghai, hoping to draw Japanese forces out of the north and into the great valley of the Yangtze, Chiang's main political base and supposedly most secure military stronghold.

The lure worked. Tokyo turned its



eyes southward, and the Japanese commander Matsui Iwane began the investment of Shanghai on August 23. He made tortuous headway against fierce but patchy Chinese resistance. (Chiang's generals executed several hundred of their soldiers for cowardice.) After suffering 30 percent casualties, Matsui's forces at last took Shanghai in early November, a military disaster for Chiang and the prelude to greater disasters that soon followed. Behind a rolling carpet of ferocious bombing, the Japanese began moving up the valley of the Yangtze toward Chiang's capital at Nanjing.

The bloody Yangtze. Less than a century earlier its teeming watershed had been convulsed by some of the worst fighting of the Taiping rebellion, a horrific fourteen-year upheaval that claimed 20 million Chinese lives. In the decade before the Japanese incursion Chiang's unruly armies had ruthlessly exterminated Communists and labor unionists along the lower Yangtze. They also looted the British, American, and Japanese consulates and murdered several foreigners. Through this historic cauldron of seething hatreds and prolific violence Matsui's troops now advanced. Chiang's soldiers scattered before them in a pell-mell rout that swelled to maniacal panic as the fighting neared the gates of Nanjing. Nationalist government officials fled the city as the Japanese drew close. Chiang himself abandoned his capital on December 8. He left behind a ragtag force under General Tang Sheng-chih to mount what rear-guard defense it could. Tang quickly gave up even the pretense of resistance. After ordering the houses outside the city walls to be set aflame as a delaying action, he boarded a launch that churned away up the Yangtze on the evening of December 12. Deserted by their leaders and fearful of being trapped inside the city by a ring of fire, the remnants of the Nanjing garrison and the additional troops streaming into the city from the lower Yangtze stampeded for what safety they could find. Thousands swarmed into the frigid waters of the river, in what quickly proved a suicidal quest for the refuge of the far shore. More thousands sought to disguise themselves and hide within the beleaguered city. They stripped off their military uniforms, looted shops and assaulted civilians for nonmilitary clothing, trampled



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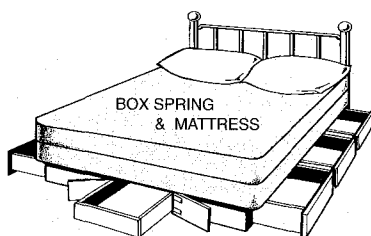
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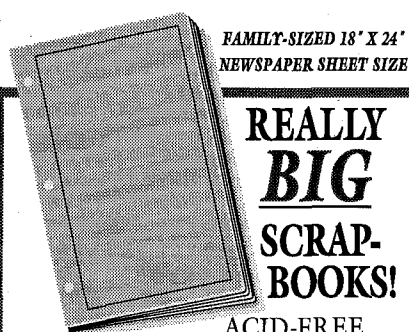


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and axed and machine-gunned their comrades, in a mad scramble to elude the oncoming invaders.

Into this scene of incomprehensible bedlam the first Japanese troops marched on December 13. After a decade of civil disorder and Nationalist marauding, and after weeks of savage bombardment by Japanese warplanes, as well as mutinous rioting and bareknuckled intimidation by their own soldiers, the city's Chinese inhabitants were so traumatized that many of them welcomed the Japanese army as a disciplined military force that might at least impose a semblance of order on the chaotic hell of bleeding, burning Nanjing. That expectation the Japanese abruptly and cruelly demolished.

The Japanese occupiers immediately began combing the city for the abandoned Chinese soldiers who had gone to ground. The procedure was certainly allowable under recognized rules of war, but Matsui's troops carried it out with wanton ferocity. They rounded up all young men of military age and proceeded to kill them in wholesale machine-gunnings and serial decapitations, sometimes in full view of horrified onlookers. Worse soon followed. Roaming bands of Japanese troops began murdering civilians at random, indiscriminately assailing the young and the old, men, women, children, and unborn fetuses alike, with bludgeon, bayonet, rifle, torch, and sword. Matsui's soldiers used both living and dead Chinese for bayonet practice. They mutilated, tortured, and maimed countless victims. According to Chang's account, they hanged people by their tongues and marinated them in acid, dismembered them, grenaded them, impaled them and burned them and flayed them and froze them and buried them alive. They also raped countless women, bestowing upon this unholy episode the name by which it has forever after been known and which furnishes Chang's title: the Rape of Nanking.

**R**EADERS fascinated by the sanguine and the macabre will not be disappointed by this book. Chang describes many incidents of unshirted mayhem in excruciating detail, and supplements her written account with a gallery of photographs whose grotesqueness no mere vocabulary can match. By any measure the Rape of Nanking was a

catastrophic horror—and Chang gives us several measures, including an estimate of the height to which the stacked bodies of the Chinese victims would reach, and even a calculation of the weight of the blood spilled during the Japanese rampage.

But if a penchant for the sensational, along with a certain credulousness, occasionally colors Chang's recounting of some of those incidents, there can be no doubt that the evidence amounts to a crushing indictment of the Japanese army's behavior. The Rape of Nanking stands out in the long and sorry annals of warfare and its crimes as an exceptionally heinous monstrosity. Even the Japanese Foreign Minister, Hirota Koki, reported after an inspection trip in January of 1938 that the "Japanese Army behaved . . . in [a] fashion reminiscent [of] Attila [and] his Huns. [Not] less than three hundred thousand Chinese civilians slaughtered, many cases [in] cold blood."

Brutality intruded even into the ironically named Safety Zone, a section of the city where thousands of refugees took shelter under the precarious protection of a hastily organized "International Committee" composed of some two dozen foreign nationals resident in Nanjing. The committee repeatedly protested to Japanese officials about the bacchanalia of violence, and set out to document formally what its members somewhat delicately called "cases of disorder." It published its sober, legalistic record of the Rape of Nanking in 1939, listing 425 such cases. To that testimony Chang has added reports of additional incidents, some taken from the records of the postwar Tokyo War Crimes Trials, some from papers later deposited in the library of the Yale Divinity School by the handful of American missionaries marooned in Nanjing in 1937, and some from an extraordinary document that Chang herself first brought to light—the diary of the chairman of the International Committee for the Safety Zone, John H.D. Rabe.

Rabe was by any account a remarkable figure, and an unlikely hero. "Why the devil did you stay?" a puzzled Japanese officer asked him in the midst of the pandemonium engulfing Nanjing. "What does all this matter to you?" "My kids and grandchildren were born here,



and I am happy and successful here," Rabe replied, adding, "I have always been treated well by the Chinese people." Rabe was a German businessman, born in Hamburg in 1882. He had lived in China since 1908, working mostly for the Siemens Company. He had learned the Chinese language, had grown to love the country, and was extremely solicitous toward his Chinese employees. He was also a Nazi. Along with a few other foreigners who worked under his guidance, Rabe shielded numberless Chinese from the Japanese juggernaut, sometimes thrusting his swastika armband at Japanese soldiers and flashing his Nazi decoration as a way to assert his authority. Not without reason, Chang calls him "the Oskar Schindler of China."

**B**UT if this improbable tale reminds us of the enigmas of good and evil and the infinite mysteries of the human personality, Chang does not bring an analogous sense of complexity to her effort to explain why the Rape of Nanking happened at all. How did military discipline first degenerate into disorder and then slide into such stupefying depravity? Were Japanese actions the result of deliberate high-level policy decisions to terrorize the Chinese? Did the Imperial Japanese Army's atrocities flow from some moral defect in the Japanese national character? From willful military indoctrination that cultivated race hatred toward the Chinese? From the bent minds of crazed local commanders? From wholesale insubordination by an ill-educated and hard-used soldiery? Or did the whole history and atmosphere of the Yangtze—especially the bloody 1937 campaign from Shanghai up the valley, which culminated in the nightmarish condition of Nanjing on December 13—somehow unbridle the demons in men's souls?

Chang explores some of these possible explanations, but pursues none of them rigorously. She is clearly tempted to argue that the Rape of Nanking resulted from formal political decisions taken at the highest levels, an argument whose virtually lone proponent is the historian David Bergamini, whom Chang repeatedly cites. In a decidedly eccentric book, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* (1971), Bergamini tried to lay the blame for Nanjing and much else squarely at the feet of

Emperor Hirohito. Chang is obliged to concede that "unfortunately, Bergamini's book was seriously criticized by reputable historians." That's putting it mildly. One reviewer observed that Bergamini was "believable only by violating every canon of acceptable documentation." The historian Barbara Tuchman said that Bergamini's thesis "appears to be almost entirely a product of the author's inference and of his predilection for the sinister explanation." Yet Chang cannot resist concluding that at the very least "Hirohito must have known about the Rape of Nanking"—far from causing it to happen, but an assertion that represents the unmistakable if meager residue of Chang's infatuation with Bergamini's long-discredited thesis.

Elsewhere Chang serves notice that "this book is not intended as a commentary on the Japanese character," but then immediately plunges into an exploration of the thousand-year-deep roots of the "Japanese identity"—a bloody business, in her estimation, replete with martial competitions, samurai ethics, and the fearsome warriors' code of bushido, the clear inference being, despite the disclaimer, that "the path to Nanking" runs through the very marrow of Japanese culture.

In the final accounting, this book does a much better job of describing the horrors of Nanjing than of explaining them. Part of that deficiency is owing to Chang's sources. With but a handful of exceptions, Chang tells her tale from the point of view of the Chinese victims in Nanjing or the Caucasian witnesses in the Safety Zone. Her evidence offers little basis for any insight into the mentality of the perpetrators. Her focus on the events in and around Nanjing, which two students of the Imperial Japanese Army describe as "only one tidemark left by a sea of atrocities inflicted by the Imperial Army on the Chinese," also compromises her effort to find a comprehensive explanation for Japanese behavior. She offers little that is comparable to the carefully nuanced analysis of the motives behind Nazi brutality that one finds in works like Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* (1992) and Omer Bartov's *The Eastern Front, 1941–1945* (1985), or even to the sustained argument found in Daniel Goldhagen's one-

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dimensional but provocative *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996), which in effect indicted the entire German nation for the crime of the Holocaust. Thus despite Chang's shocking description of the events in Nanjing, she gives the reader little reason to conclude that what happened there should be compared to the systematic killing of the Holocaust, an episode that was surely the loathsome spawn of Hitler's purposeful policy—not an incident of war or the mere exorcism of individual cruelty or the result of a poorly disciplined army run amok. The Holocaust entailed a methodical application of all the apparatus of the modern bureaucratic state and all the most advanced technologies of killing to the cold-blooded business of mass murder.

ACCUSATION and outrage, rather than analysis and understanding, are this book's dominant motifs, and although outrage is a morally necessary response to Nanjing, it is an intellectually insufficient one. To what purpose is Chang's outrage directed? Nothing less than hauling Japan "before the bar of world opinion" and forcing it to acknowledge its war crimes. She assails both the Western world's alleged ignorance about the Rape of Nanking and the refusal of several prominent Japanese figures to admit that it even happened. Japan "remains to this day a renegade nation," she writes, having "managed to avoid the moral judgment of the civilized world that the Germans were made to accept for their actions in this nightmare time." Western indifference and Japanese denial, she says, amount to "a second rape," violating the memory of the dead and profaning the claims of history. Why, she asks, is there no equivalent of *Schindler's List* for Nanjing? How can a Japanese nationalist like Ishihara Shintaro, the author of *The Japan That Can Say No*, get away with calling the Rape of Nanking "a lie... made up by the Chinese"? Chang concludes,

At a minimum, the Japanese government needs to issue an official apology to the victims, pay reparations to the people whose lives were destroyed in the rampage, and, most important, educate future generations of Japanese citizens about the true facts of the massacre.

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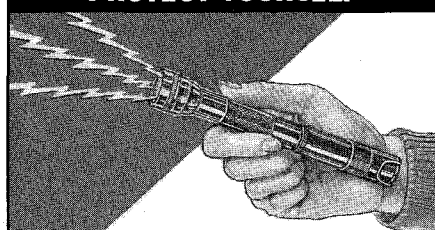


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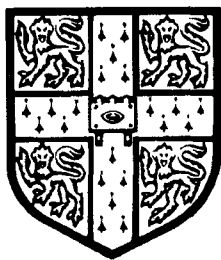
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Her charges are not so much wrong as exaggerated. Similarly, her demands on present-day Japan are less unwarranted than at least partly redundant.

The Western world in fact neither then nor later ignored the Rape of Nanking. American attention was riveted on the lower Yangtze in December of 1937, not least because in the course of their attack Japanese planes sank the U.S. gunboat *Panay*. Jammed with refugees, the 450-ton, two-stack ship was anchored in the river just above Nanjing and conspicuously identified by huge American flags spread over its fore and aft decks and flying from every mast. Unknown to the American public at the time, the *Panay* was also not so innocently serving as a radio-communications link between the city's warring garrison and the departed Chiang Kai-shek. The uproar in the United States over the sinking subsided only after a series of highly publicized apologies by the Japanese Foreign Minister, the removal from command of the Japanese officer whose flyers were responsible for the sinking, a Japanese naval salute to the people killed in the attack, and the Japanese government's offer of a \$2.2 million indemnity—all actions, not incidentally, that testified both to official remorse and to considerable anxiety within the Japanese government about its ability to control local commanders and individual combatants in China. At the same time, American newspapers carried extensive and lurid coverage of the Rape of Nanking. "Wholesale looting, the violation of women, the murder of civilians, the eviction of Chinese from their homes, mass executions of war prisoners and the impressing of able-bodied men turned Nanking into a city of terror," F. Tillman Durdin reported beneath banner headlines on the front page of *The New York Times* on December 18, 1937. The Rape of Nanking later became a staple of wartime anti-Japanese propaganda, especially in Frank Capra's *Battle of China*, one of several films in his "Why We Fight" series that were screened for millions of U.S. troops in training camps and millions of civilians in commercial movie theaters throughout the United States.

Nor is Chang entirely correct that Japan has obstinately refused to acknowl-

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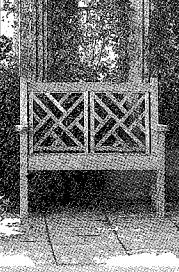
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edge its wartime crimes, let alone express regret for them. That accusation has become a cliché of Western criticism of Japan in recent years, perhaps most notably in Ian Buruma's study of war memories in Germany and Japan, *The Wages of Guilt* (1994), whose general thesis might be summarized as "Germany remembers too much, Japan too little." To be sure, the Japanese Ministry of Education in the early 1980s did try to discourage mentioning Nanjing and other wartime unpleasanties in secondary school textbooks, and a Japanese distributor did (unsuccessfully) attempt in 1988 to cut a thirty-second sequence depicting the Rape of Nanking from Bernardo Bertolucci's film *The Last Emperor*. And it remains true that reverential visits to Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, honoring Japan's military dead, including war criminals, are still obligatory for right-wing Japanese politicians. But a vocal Japanese left has long kept the memory of Nanjing alive. It is also true, as John Dower recently pointed out, that

on June 9, 1995, the lower house of the Japanese Diet expressed "deep remorse" (*fukai hansei*) for the suffering that Japan inflicted on other peoples during the Second World War, and that two recent Japanese Prime Ministers have tendered clear apologies (*owabi*) for Imperial Japan's offenses against other nations. Dower additionally noted that "popular Japanese discourse concerning . . . war responsibility . . . is more diversified than usually is appreciated outside Japan," and that "the non-Japanese media [have] also generally failed to report that current textbooks approved by the conservative Ministry of Education speak more frankly about Japanese aggression and atrocities than was the case up through the 1980s."

As atrocities follow war, so history follows atrocities—a lesson that this book doggedly demonstrates. And even in a culture as muted as Japan's, murder will eventually out. It remains, however, to explain it, as this book only imperfectly does. ☸

## BRIEF REVIEWS



### William Styron

by James L. W. West III.

Random House, 528 pages, \$30.00.

Mr. West's "Life" originates in conversations with his subject, or with Mr. Styron's friends and associates, which may account for the dutiful but spiritless tone of the book's opening pages. When Styron was thirteen, his mother died horribly of cancer, and his eventual stepmother was fiercely unsympathetic. A certain vagueness of reminiscence on those points is understandable. In other respects, Styron was lucky. His father gave encouragement and support. His abilities were recognized early. His first novel—*Lie Down in Darkness*—was a critical and commercial success. His service with the Marines gave him insight

into the military but never took him out of the country. He found a wife of congenial tastes and literary accomplishments, whose inherited money kept the couple in comfort while Styron wrote at the slow pace required for the creation of his intricately patterned, carefully researched fictions. When Mr. West gets to Styron's professional career, the people he knew, the founding of *The Paris Review*, and the controversies engendered by his books, the text becomes immediate and energetic, well supplied with letters, quotations, rivalries, testy reviewers, and international publishing complications. The reader can enjoy both an intelligent survey of Styron's work and a practical report on what a successful author does—or puts up with—besides writing his books.



## Between Heaven and Hell

by W. Bruce Lincoln.  
Viking, 511 pages,  
\$34.95.

Professor Lincoln proposes to explain what has made Russian art so unmistakably Russian. He attributes that character to "the ongoing conflict between foreign influence and native experience, and a firm belief that rulers have a duty to shape the arts of their people"—leading to "an inner anguish that is uniquely and perversely Russian." His text covers a thousand years of all forms of art, its practitioners, and their problems. It is very thick indeed with information, and is therefore worth reading, but it never satisfactorily explains what makes Russian art Russian. Whatever that was, it must have happened more than a thousand years ago.

## Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson

edited by Ernest Mehew.  
Yale, 626 pages,  
\$39.95.

There is a complete collection of Stevenson's letters, in eight volumes. This well-annotated selection occupies a mere 600 pages—a great kindness to admirers of a superb letter writer who are not prepared to devote their lives to his correspondence.

## An Instance of the Fingerpost

by Iain Pears.  
Riverhead, 800 pages,  
\$27.00.

Mr. Pears's novel is set in Oxford in the year 1663, although the events are related much later, by four men connected in some way with the murder of an unpleasant professor. It was a lively time, with the tensions and hostilities of the late war still seething under the surface of Restoration society, and the scientific and philosophical speculations suppressed under Cromwell exploding into action. The author has a sound grip on the period and an imagination worthy of Dickens. His narrators are variously uninformed, misinformed, and lying. They also occasionally tell the truth. The reader encounters medical

experiment, theological argument, bibliophilia, and code-cracking, on the way to a thoroughly surprising conclusion. He also encounters some sly comedy, for a Venetian visitor—a dilettante medical man—has much to say about English weather, food, and table manners, while his hosts have much to say about Venetian dress and courtesies. The characters are differentiated by their ideas and the actions they report, and these contain both honest clues and artful red herrings. The underlying pattern, when it is at last revealed, may well have historical warrant, for the author is unquestionably a learned scholar as well as a nervy and ingenious plot-master.

## The Brontës

by Juliet Barker.  
Overlook, 448 pages,  
\$35.00.

Books about the Brontë family must be almost as prevalent as those about the Civil War, but this is a good one. Ms. Barker has created "A Life in Letters" out of surviving papers and testimony by Brontë contemporaries. The letters are principally by Charlotte, because Anne seldom wrote anything but innocuous social notes, and Emily, who never made a friend outside the family, cannot be said to have written letters at all. Few of Branwell's letters survive, and those that do present a weird contrast between kowtows to superiors and hail-fellow informality with friends. Charlotte made up for all of them, and her correspondence, plus Ms. Barker's discreet connecting narrative, provides a real sense of what those strange, brilliant people were like—simultaneously withdrawn from life and passionately interested in it.

## Riddle of the Ice

by Myron Arms.  
Doubleday/Anchor, 267 pages,  
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The author is a yachtsman with serious concerns about ecology and climate change. When a voyage to northern Labrador was blocked by "a massive area of sea ice that should not have been there," he did not dismiss the problem as a hazard of his sport. He set about studying all that is known, suggested, or as-

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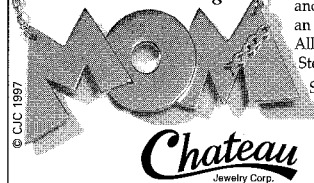
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**THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY'S  
FOURTH ANNUAL PUZZLER CONTEST**

**"THREE-RING  
CIRCUS"**

Solve the  
Puzzler on the  
facing page and send  
your solution, by April 15,  
to *The Atlantic Monthly*,  
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Rules: No purchase necessary. Print your name, address, and solution to the Puzzler Contest on a postcard. Mail entry to: *The Atlantic Monthly*, Puzzler Contest, 77 N. Washington St., Boston, MA 02114. You must solve the April 1998 Puzzler correctly to be eligible to win. Entries must be received no later than midnight on April 15, 1998. One entry per person. Odds of winning depend on the number of eligible entries received. One prize of a Zingerman's gift certificate (retail value \$150.00) will be awarded based on a random drawing from among the correct entries. By acceptance of prize, winner consents to announcement of winner's name and to the use of name/likeness and entry material submitted in any manner and in any medium for advertising/trade without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Contest is open to residents of the U.S. and Canada, except the Province of Quebec, and is subject to complete rules. For complete rules, send an SASE to *The Atlantic Monthly* at the above address.

sumed about the behavior of ice between Labrador and Greenland. There proved to be much to study, including the possibility that the area is the source of an ocean current with global climatic impact. Mr. Arms's book combines the log of a subsequent voyage through that water with scientific facts and theories about the place. Both are reinforced by descriptions of the fierce and beautiful area through which his cutter *Brendan's Isle* sailed. Sailed, that is, when possible—one idealistic crew member sulked bitterly about air pollution whenever the diesel went into action. The book is excellent as log, ice study, and landscape portrayal.

### **Asleep in the Sun**

by Hans Silvester.  
*Chronicle*, 142 pages,  
\$29.95.

Mr. Silvester provides another photographic report on the Greek island cats—this time as examples of how to enjoy a proper siesta. Useless advice. We poor human beings can consider sun, shade, breeze, and good company, but we cannot defy gravity on top of a potted plant, nor can we ever look as elegantly flexible as cats. We can only admire them.

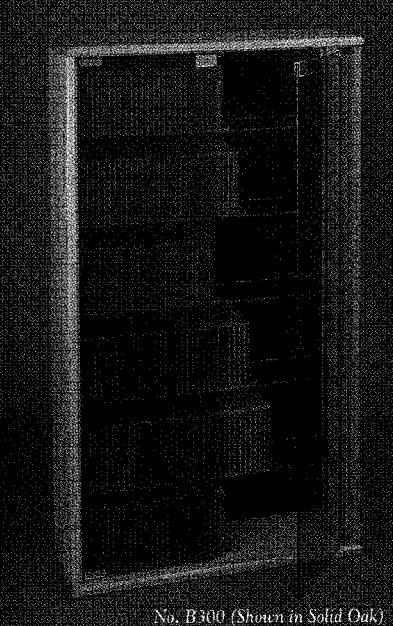
### **A History of Power in Europe**

by Wim Blockmans.  
*Abrams*, 402 pages,  
\$60.00.

The author is a distinguished specialist in European history with a long list of scholarly positions. His book examines, at high speed, the operations of power in Europe during the past thousand years, focusing on the activities of the states (political), the nations (cultural), and the marketplace (economic). Because these forces have developed at different speeds and with different effects in different areas, the text tends to whirl rapidly around the Continent and to resort to a good deal of generalization. It is nonetheless a rewarding overall view, while the handsome illustrations are a delightful medley of the great and the familiar, the little known, the maliciously subversive, and the truly surprising.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

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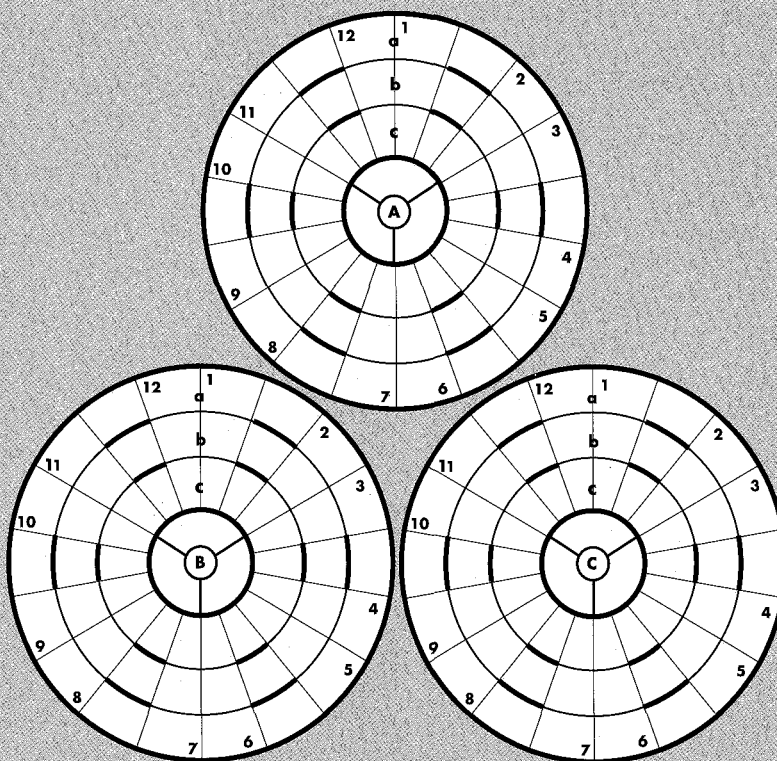
# THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

## Three-Ring Circus

Each of this puzzle's three Rings (A, B, and C) is divided into three concentric Circles (a, b, and c) and 18 Sectors. Each of the nine Circles (Aa, Ab, etc.) contains three consecutive six-letter entries going clockwise from an unmarked starting point. The 12 numbered Sectors contain entries (1-12) of either nine or ten letters broken into three pieces, one piece per Ring, entered from the perimeter inward. Any piece may go in any of the Rings. Ten-letter answers have one four-letter piece (which may be the first, second, or third of the entry's three pieces) whose fourth letter protrudes into the center of its Ring. If all this is making your head spin, take heart; when every answer has been entered, you'll find the source of the dizzying effect in the nine letters filling the centers of the three Rings. Clue answers include four capitalized words.

See facing page for contest details. The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 111.



### Circles

- Aa.** Suddenly reveal Spanish circus to Caesar  
Merv is prepared for realistic portrayal  
Celebration somewhat satisfies Tarheels
- Ab.** Writer's glassware found in a biergarten  
Get up and go before excessive ingestion, eating a container of veggies (*two words*)  
Glass rods seen in abstract Miró
- Ac.** Clinton initially playing tenor instrument  
Thoughts revolving around curriculum's last part of a weekend in Paris  
Political theorist's goal in creative work
- Ba.** Jellyfish amused crackpot  
Place to get a drink, say, in Tennessee  
Quite a few farm machines initially sent back

- Bb.** Commit poor Eve to sitting behind Democrat  
Singer on the east side of Rhode Island theater district  
Lauder of makeup starting with true guinea pig
- Bc.** Colonial leader married Eskimo  
Disturbed sleep with a tickle  
Make a mistake in addition task
- Ca.** Ice pinnacles frighten ship's pilot on the way back  
*E.T.*, in jest, recast *High Society*? (*two words*)  
A soothsayer's conclusion can answer mysteries
- Cb.** Janitor's helper fixed his melancholy  
Publisher is one bringing legal action  
Horsey adorned with bangles between head and tail
- Cc.** Gym in a ghetto provides refuge  
The first man in Maine married woman abroad  
King with a count's way of fighting

### Sectors

1. Detain navy in Turkey, heading west for volcanic island
2. Again excite the attention of others about bats in tree
3. Experimenter with freezing toes crying miserably
4. Gang member led Quentin astray
5. With quiet bearing, reaches out for pipe
6. Cars backed up outside before "Love Songs"
7. Steered northeast into purple and scarlet
8. Colleague with a bit of marijuana caught by officer attending civil disturbance
9. Sunday, Peter takes Ed's racer
10. Strangely, negativism is efficient (*hyphenated*)
11. Worn-out spot next to counter held by a trio
12. Most sharp, stylish neckwear carried by Kitty

**Note:** The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

# WORD WATCH

by Anne H. Soukhanov

**amenities creep** *noun*, an escalation in recent years in the number and cost of conveniences in the guest rooms of hotels: "It's called *amenities creep*," said James J. Eyster, H.V.S. Professor of Hotel Real Estate and Finance at the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration. . . . From Tokyo to Tampa, guests . . . are being showered with perks, some silly, some truly sublime" (*New York Times*).

**BACKGROUND:** *Amenities creep* is the latest phase of a marketing effort begun in the 1970s, when hotels started to stock guest rooms with items such as shower caps and soap. Soon they began adding built-in hair dryers, robes, and courtesy bars. Now, free of charge, come homemade cookies, in-room laptop computers, goldfish meant to serve as temporary pets, movies shown in theaters off the lobby, and children's "storylines" built into guest-room phones.

**hospitalist** *noun*, a hospital-based physician who assumes the responsibilities traditionally held by an inpatient's own physician—that is, seeing the patient daily, directing treatment, and approving his or her discharge:

*A selection of terms that have newly been coined, that have recently acquired new currency, or that have taken on new meanings, compiled by the executive editor of The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition.*

"[He] is one of a growing number of . . . *hospitalists*, a sort of designated hitter who stands in for a patient's regular family physician or internist while the patient is in the hospital" (*Wall Street Journal*).

**BACKGROUND:** Medical groups and hospitals, especially those in managed-care plans, are increasingly hiring *hospitalists* to expedite patients' treatment and release, and to cut costs; some 1,200 to 1,500 *hospitalists* currently practice. Studies have shown that the use of hospital-based doctors does increase efficiency: decisions can be made without waiting for the arrival of an outside doctor, who, in turn, can see more patients in the office if freed from hospital rounds. Critics argue that the use of hospital-based doctors may compromise the continuity of a patient's care; proponents contend that the quality of care may in fact be improved, because *hospitalists* typically have greater experience with serious ill-

ness than many office-based doctors. Hospital-based doctors have long been common in Canada and Great Britain. However, the term *hospitalist* is quite recent: it was first used by Robert M. Wachter, a leading physician in the *hospitalist* movement, in a 1996 essay, co-authored by Lee Goldman, in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Although most -ist words derive from words ending in -ism, *hospitalist* is an exception: *hospitalism*, first recorded in 1869, was used to denote the nonhygienic conditions in old, overcrowded hospitals.

**pink trash** *noun, slang*, the newly revived literary legacy of Jacqueline Susann's 1966 novel *Valley of the Dolls*: "Pink Trash: Return to Valley of the Dolls: Camp and Glam and Still Badly Dressed, Jacqueline Susann Is Back" (headline, *New York Times*).

**BACKGROUND:** This term derives from Susann's subject—the seamy underside of show business—and from reports that she typed her manuscripts on pink paper. Although *Valley of the Dolls* was out of print for 15 years (it was reissued last fall), it has maintained a devoted following, especially among gay men and lesbians (the novel offered one of the first sympathetic portrayals of homosexuals in popular culture). The book has inspired poems, drinking games on the Internet, a drag pageant, and theme parties, called *V.O.D. parties*, at which, for example, jellybeans shaped like Valium pills (Susann's "dolls") are served.

**proggy** *noun, slang*, a computer program that enables online criminals to steal passwords and credit-card numbers, so that they can use their victims' online identities to send offensive messages or make financial transactions: "Hackers post *proggies* around the Internet and trade them like baseball cards" (*Wall Street Journal*).

**BACKGROUND:** Attacks with *proggies* have been especially prevalent on America Online, in part because of that service's size. They typically involve *phishing* (*ph* for *f* is a common hacker substitution) for other users' personal information. A hacker might, for instance, transmit a message purportedly from the AOL billing department, requesting that a user "validate" his or her password and screen name so that the service can "fix" its records, and threatening to terminate the user's account if he or she does not comply. *Carding*, a form of *phishing*, employs various tricks to obtain a user's full name and credit-card information. Hackers who engage in such activities are called *snerts*, reportedly an acronym for "snot-nosed egotistical rude twits."

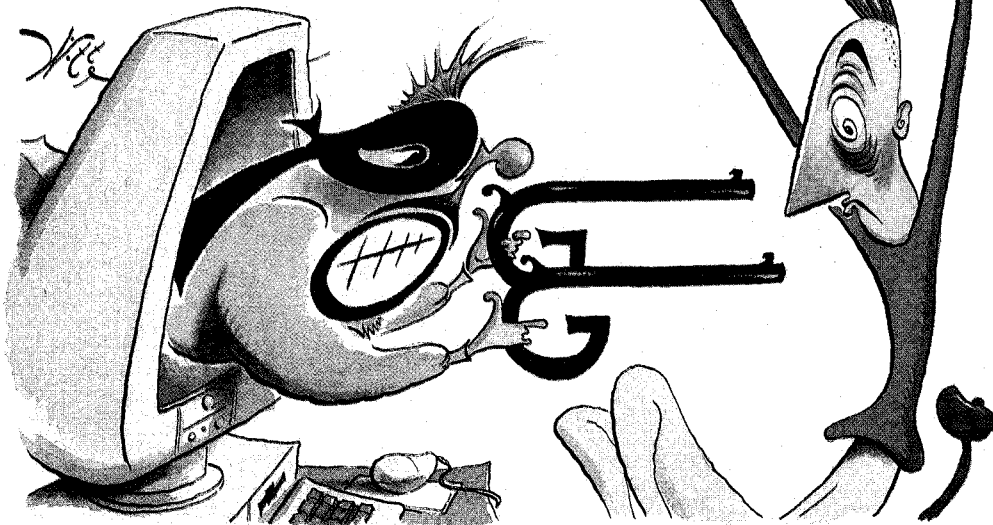


Illustration by Michael C. Witte



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